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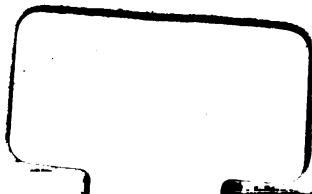
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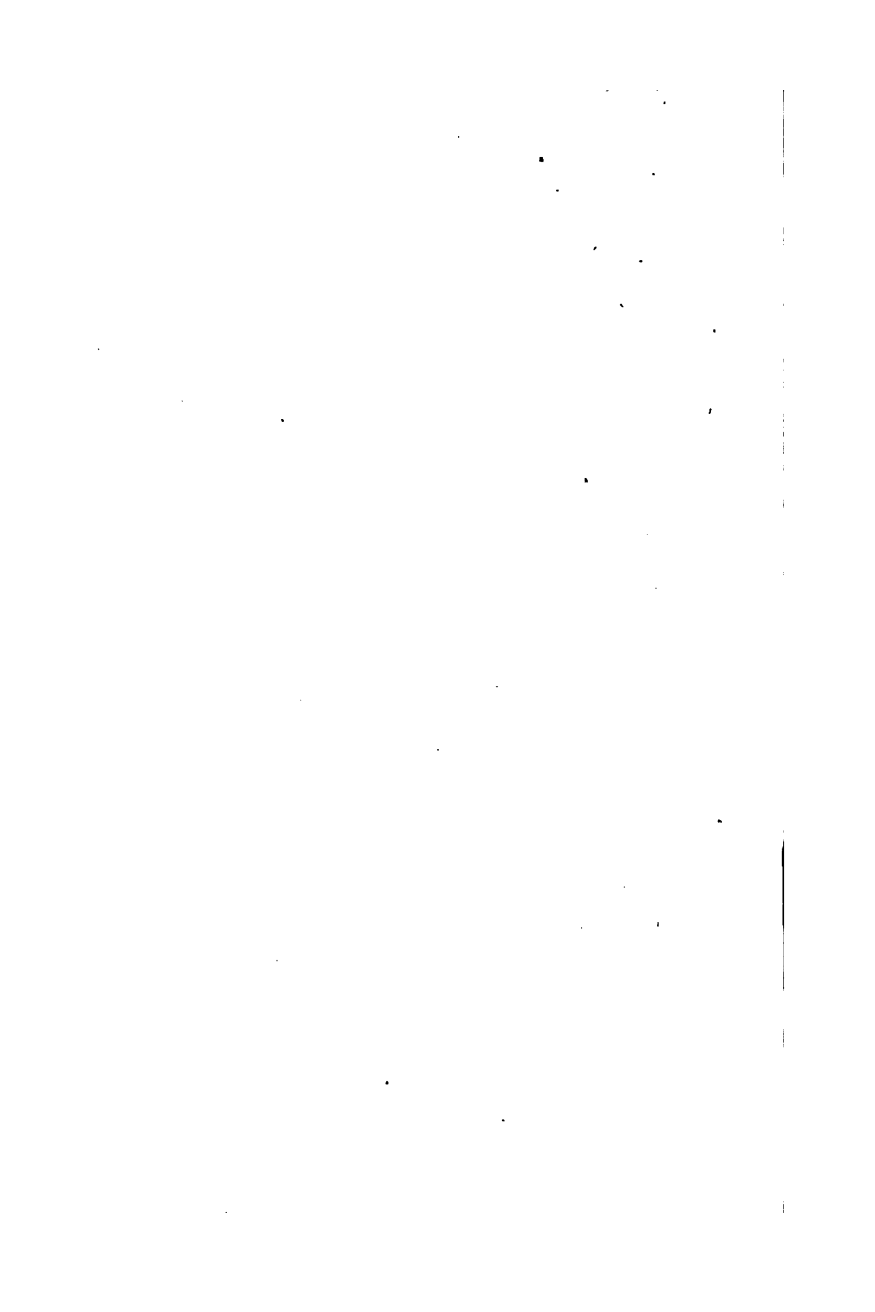


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*Congregational church-polity*

A

# MANUAL

FOR

YOUNG CHURCH-MEMBERS.

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BY LEONARD BACON,  
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN NEW-HAVEN.

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NEW-HAVEN,  
PUBLISHED BY STEPHEN COOKE.

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## PREFACE.

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THE substance of the following chapters, was addressed to my own people, a few months since, in a course of Sunday evening lectures. The reason which induced me to attempt, in those discourses, a plain exhibition of the nature, design, and rights of christian churches, and of the duties and relations of church-members, was not any desire to waken the spirit of sectarian controversy, but a conviction that church-members generally, need plain and practical instruction on these subjects; and that in my own church, to which about one hundred and fifty had then recently been added, such instruction was at that time especially appropriate. Every pastor has occasion to see how liable the members of the churches are to fall into serious errors of practice, through the want of distinct information. Every pastor knows that when new members are received into the church, and are

called to bear their part in its duties, there is peculiar need of instruction on these subjects. And there are few pastors, I believe, in New England, who have not at some time looked round for some popular exhibition of the principles of our church order, and of the corresponding duties of church-members, which they might recommend to their people.

There are several books in circulation which touch upon these subjects ; but not one I think which occupies precisely the same ground with the little treatise now submitted to the public. Dr. Hawes' " Tribute to the memory of the Pilgrims," is an eloquent vindication of the Congregational churches ; but it goes into no details respecting the duties of church-members. Professor Upham's " Ratio Disciplinæ," is a guide for students, and ministers, and ecclesiastical councils, but probably was not designed for popular use. Mr. Harvey's " Obligations of Believers, to the visible Church," studiously avoids all questions about ecclesiastical order, and touches on none of the topics which I have attempted to exhibit, except in the able chapter

on discipline. Mr. James' "Church-Members Guide" is a book of great usefulness, and had it been written with express reference to the wants of the New England churches would have left no room for this humble effort.

Had I written with a view to controversy, the aspect of these pages would have been very different,—the margin would have been duly fortified with an array of authorities,—and here and there might have been a sprinkling of Greek, signifying the state of the author's equipments for disputation. But writing first for a popular audience, and then for readers of common learning, I have chosen to omit all those citations, and all those references to learned authors, which to such readers would be altogether unprofitable.

I do not expect that every reader will be pleased with every thing which he may find in this book ; nor have I written with any such design. The book is designed for the use and benefit of Congregational church-members ; if they read it, and profit by it, I shall not be solicitous about its reception in other quarters. It may be thought that in speaking of the opinions

and practices of other evangelical denominations, I have spoken with little ceremony ; but I trust none will say that I have spoken in the style of bigotry or ill-nature.

The question may be asked, Why treat of the peculiarities of Congregationalism ? Why not take common ground, and illustrate the duties of church-members without reference to any form of ecclesiastical organization ? My answer is, The views which we take in respect to the organization of churches, must needs modify very materially our views of the duties of church-members. What are the duties of a church-member according to the system of the church of England, or of the Episcopal church in this country ? What are the duties of a church-member according to the system established by Wesley ? What are the duties of membership in a Presbyterian church ? Let the answers to these several questions be drawn out, and exhibited side by side with the duties of a Congregational church-member ; and, if I have not mistaken the facts in the case, you will have a striking exhibition of the practical importance of

the question about the proper organization of churches. To make that question fundamental in the christian religion, and to unchurch all who do not agree with ourselves concerning it, is one error. To imagine that because the question is unessential, it is therefore unimportant, and ought never to be agitated; and that all forms are of course equally right and equally valuable, is another error,—I do not say a greater. The former is the error that most easily besets some churches; the latter is not unfrequent among Congregationalists.

Our fathers, it may be, attached too much importance to inquiries of this nature. Yet I cannot but think that their zeal for the principles of Congregationalism, was as wise as the indifference of some of their successors; for in its results that zeal of theirs has greatly benefitted the cause of christianity. I cannot but think that if the Congregational organization should be extensively adopted by evangelical christians every where, the result would be not only a vast extension of the principles and of the life of rational liberty, but a great developement of the

spirit of christian purity and fidelity, and of the energy of christian zeal. It is not necessary that this organization should be the only one ; for wherever Congregationalism exists in such a form as to operate to any considerable extent on the public mind, there, in spite of opposing institutions, the principles of Congregationalism will take effect in every quarter. Such is the fact in this country. Every religious sect here, under whatever forms it may be organized, is more or less affected by those principles of the Pilgrims which have been sown broadcast over the land. And I cannot doubt that the formation of Congregational churches in France and Germany, would ere long give a mighty impulse to the revival of pure christianity in those countries. The existing institutions of Protestantism might not indeed be subverted ; but if not to be subverted they would by and by be purified and quickened. A new sense of individual power and rights, and of individual responsibility, would rouse the minds of believers to inquiry, and stimulate their faculties to effort. Thus a new leaven would speedily be found working in the

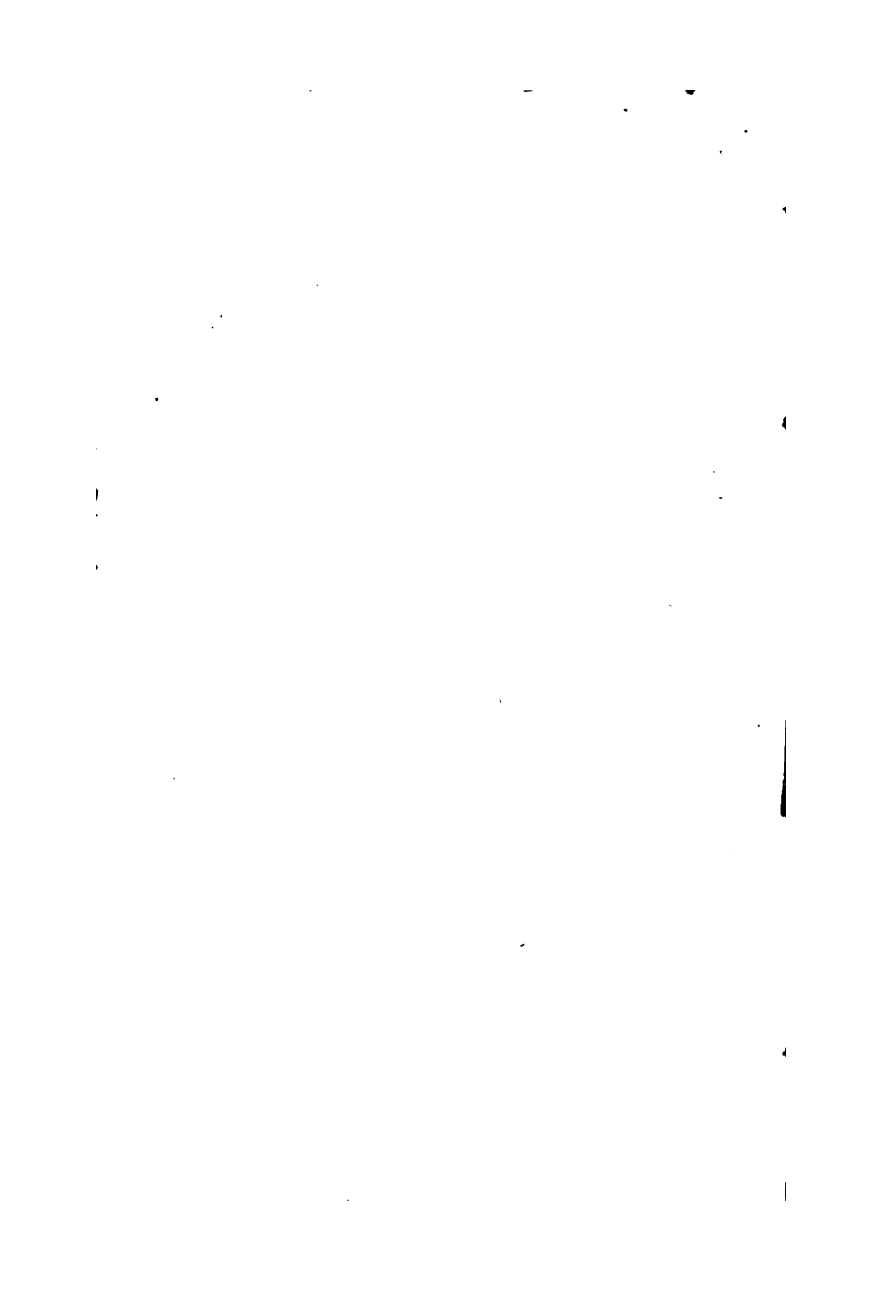
Protestant community ; and a new spirit of life and liberty and strength would pervade the ancient shrines,—might I not rather say?—the mouldering mausoleums of the once glorious but now dead and decaying Reformation.

I submit this work to the candor and kindness of my brethren in the ministry, and in the churches, praying them to remember the end for which New England was settled. It was the testimony of one of the fathers to his fellow exiles,\* “ You have solemnly professed before God, angels and men, that the cause of your leaving your country, kindred and fathers’ houses, and transporting yourselves with your wives, little ones, and substance over the vast ocean into this waste and howling wilderness, was your liberty to walk in the faith of the gospel, with all good conscience according to the order of the gospel, and your enjoyment of the pure worship of God according to his institution.” This, he told them, was “ New England’s errand into the wilderness.” May the children of New England never forget it.

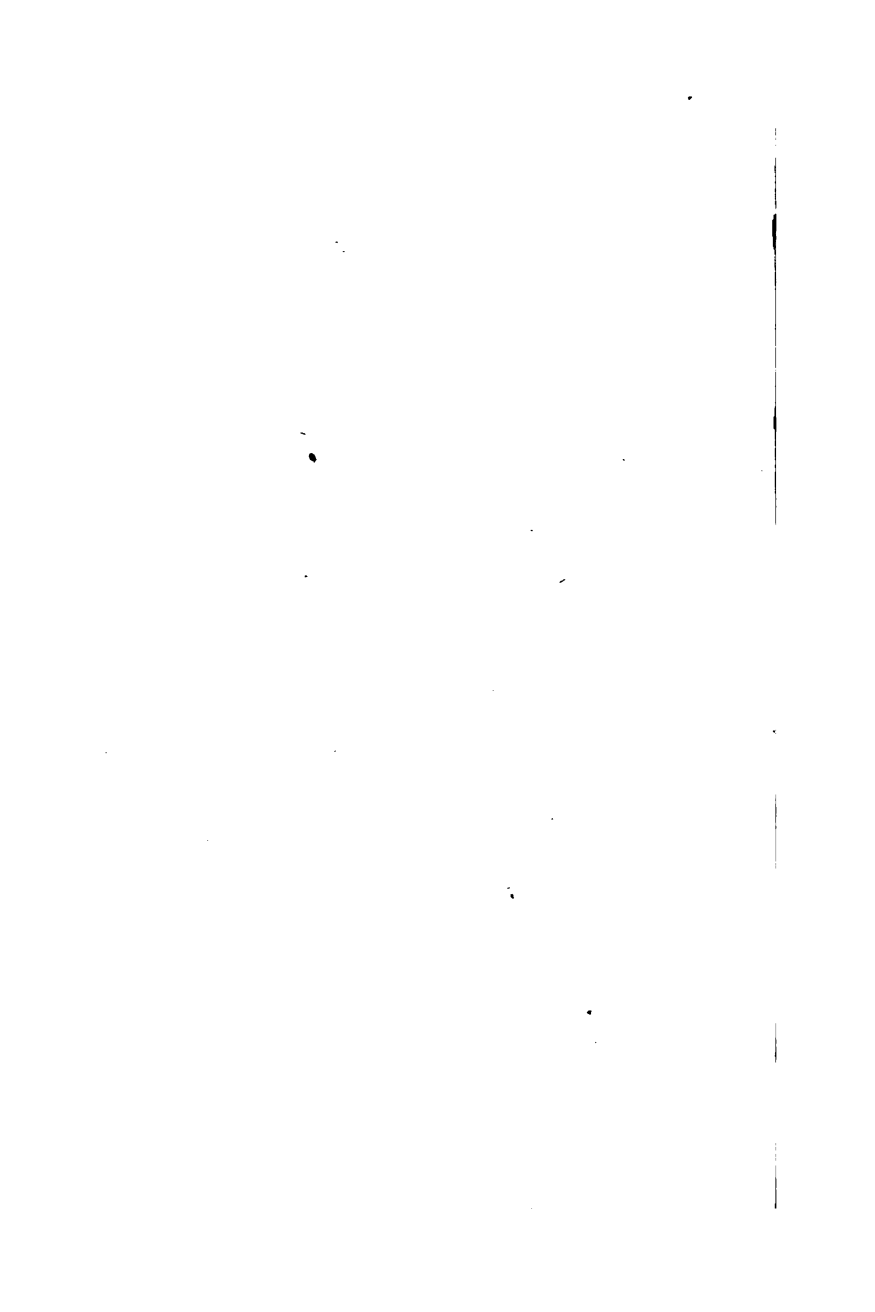
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\* Danforth’s Election Sermon, 1670.





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# MANUAL

## FOR

### YOUNG CHURCH-MEMBERS.

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#### CHAPTER I.

*Constitution and rights of the Apostolic Churches.*

"Confirming the churches." Acts xv. 41.

You have become a member of a church. You have a part to act as one of its brotherhood. You owe many duties to those with whom you are associated in this sacred relation. According to the constitution and usages of our churches, you are to deliberate and to vote in the admission of new members, in the election of all church officers, and in the entire administration of the order and discipline of Christ's house. It is important to your personal improvement, and to your usefulness, that you know what are your duties in this relation, and what your privileges; and you cannot fully know your duties or your privileges, certainly you can neither intelligently

perform the one nor duly appreciate the other, unless you understand the nature, the character, the powers and privileges of the society into which you have entered.

Besides, churches are of many names, and are distinguished from each other not only by peculiarities of doctrine, but more frequently by peculiarities of order and government. In becoming a member of a Congregational church you have shown a preference for the order of these ancient churches of New England. Perhaps you have been led to this preference by the force of education, by the example of your friends, by your own love of simplicity, or by a conviction that this mode of organizing churches, and conducting their affairs, is happily suited to the state of society in such a country as ours, and to the simplicity and spirituality of the christian religion. But ought you not to understand how this ecclesiastical order is to be defended against the claims of other churches, which profess to be eminently and perhaps exclusively apostolic? You need not become a zealous and polemic sectarian; you ought to guard against every rising of that spirit which would have no communion but with those who can agree to pin every curtain of the tabernacle just as you do. Yet it is not too much to say that if the organization of the church to which you have joined yourself, is, as it is often affirmed to be, at war

with the fabric of the primitive churches, and subversive of apostolic order, you ought to know it, and you ought to testify against it; and on the other hand, if your church is essentially scriptural in its structure, and as such may be clearly vindicated against such charges, so oft repeated, and so solemnly assevered, you ought to know on what grounds its vindication rests.

You are interested, then, not only in the general subject of this book, but in the particular inquiry which I have immediately in view, namely an inquiry concerning the nature, design, and rights of a church, according to the scriptures. I design to answer these three questions. What were the churches established by the apostles, and how were they constituted? What was the object for which they were formed? And what were understood to be their rights and powers?

I. What is a church after the apostolic model? How is it constituted? I answer, it is a local association of believers in Christ, formed by the free consent and mutual agreement of the members.

1. I say it is a *local* society, because we read in the New Testament, not of a national church, or a provincial church, but only of churches in particular cities and villages. We do not read of such a thing as the church of Galatia, or the church of Syria, or the church of Judea, we read

of no church that included within its jurisdiction the christians of a nation or a province ; but we read of the church at Phillippi, and in the same province and neighborhood we find also the church of the Thessalonians ; and we read of one church at Corinth, and of another church some five miles off at Cenchrea. And when the apostles have occasion to speak collectively of the christians in a province or a nation, they speak of churches, "the churches of Galatia," "the churches of Judea," "the churches of Asia ;" they do this with the most accurate uniformity. I say therefore that a church is a *local* society.

2. I say it is a society of believers in Christ, or at least of persons who give credible evidence that they have become new creatures in Christ ; because we find the apostle Paul calling the church which he organized at Ephesus, a "flock" of which the "Holy Ghost" was guardian, "the church of the Lord which he hath purchased with his blood ;" and because we find him addressing "the church of God which is at Corinth," as consisting of persons "called to be saints," and "sanctified in Christ Jesus ;" and because we find him, in all his epistles to the churches, not merely exhorting them to become saints, but appealing to them as having already become so at least by profession. Whom did the apostles and their companions in travel gather into churches ? Any, think you, who did not pro-

fess to have experienced repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ? Any who did not promise a true obedience to all the principles and requisitions of the gospel? Read the record of their labors—read their epistles to the churches, and you can entertain no question on this point. A church, in the apostolic style, is a society of disciples, persons credibly professing to follow the Savior and to trust in him.

3. I say it is a society formed by the free consent and agreement of its members; because there is obviously no other way in which the primitive churches, organized by the apostles, could possibly have been formed. I think any man might task himself in vain to imagine a way in which the church at Philippi, for example, could have been instituted, but by the converts in that place, under the instruction and counsel of the apostle and his associates, voluntarily agreeing and mutually engaging to walk together as a religious community in obedience to the gospel. A man is subject to the government of the country in which he lives, independently of any consent or covenant on his part; but the churches of the New Testament, were formed on a different principle, no man could become a member of one of them, but by agreeing to become such.

II. What are the objects for which a church is formed? What was the design of the apos-



ties in gathering their converts into such associations?

1. I answer, some such arrangement was obviously essential to the permanent existence of christianity as a system of religion. Unless those who were interested in the gospel, were associated together in some way, there could be no stated public worship, no religious institutions of any kind. Unless those who believed, were marshalled together, under some distinctive organization, how was there to be any sufficient and permanent visible profession of discipleship? how were the world to know whom to regard as christians?

2. In the institution of churches, it was the design of the apostles, and it is God's design, to apply the social principles of human nature to the promotion of religion. In a church there are brought together into a distinct and publicly known society, men "called to be saints," the professed disciples of the Lord Jesus, trusting in his mediation with the Father, and following in his steps, men whose views and feelings and hopes are congenial and at the same time peculiar and distinctive. Why was this done? Evidently, that the power of sympathy, the feeling of brotherhood, the influence of common interests and principles and affections might operate more effectually in each and in all.

3. A leading object in the institution of

churches, is the mutual benefit of the members. A prominent idea in the New Testament account of churches, is that the members are associated together for mutual watchfulness and mutual assistance in the christian life ; that according to their several abilities and opportunities, they are to minister to each other's instruction and edification ; that they are to unite in worship, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together ; that they are to exhort one another lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin ; and that they are to incite each other to love and good works. I have not time under this topic to go into particulars either of statement or of proof. But if any one must needs have proof that mutual assistance and mutual advantage as christians was a leading object in the institution of the primitive churches, let him read the twelfth and fourteenth chapters of Paul's first epistle " to the church of God which is at Corinth," and then let him say what sort of a society that was. It ought to be added, that so far was the idea of mutual assistance carried out, that the widows and needy members of the church were freely supported out of the common stock.

4. Another important object attained by the institution of churches, is this, christians are thus enabled to operate more efficiently on the world around them. This surely cannot need much illustration. Did not the apostles know that

union is strength ; and that the power of individuals is not only accumulated but increased by association. And with their views of the importance of christian example and christian effort, was the advantage of combination out of their minds, think you, when they undertook to gather their converts into churches ?

III. Our third inquiry respects the rights and powers of the apostolic churches. On this subject we may say,

1. It is not among the powers of any church, to make laws either extending, or modifying, or repealing the laws of Christ. In the primitive churches, the apostles were acknowledged as having a certain power, far superior to the power of churches and of all church officers, a certain power of legislation, the power of settling controversies by authority, the power of declaring what hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost, announcing new doctrines and establishing new orders in the churches. With that authority of the apostles the church had no right to interfere. And so it is now ; the authority of Christ, and of the word of God revealed through the apostles, is the only legitimate authority over christians in matters of religion. No church on earth has any right to introduce new doctrines or new religious institutions—to add anything to the things written in the Bible, or to take any thing away.

2. Under the apostles it was considered the privilege of every church to choose its own officers. The apostles might establish the office, define its nature and extent, and might prescribe the qualifications necessary in the office ; but farther than this they never thought of proceeding. There is not an instance on record in which even the apostles took it upon them to appoint any man, by their own authority to any office in any church. When the seven were chosen in the church at Jerusalem, to superintend the daily distribution to the needy, they were chosen by the people. "The multitude of the disciples" were called together, and to them the apostles said, "Brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." When Paul and Barnabas revisiting their converts in Lycaonia and Pisidia, are said in our translation to have "ordained them elders in every church," the word translated ordained, means to appoint by a vote, as is done with the lifting up hands in a popular assembly ; and the expression thus implies, that in every church the elders were elected by taking the votes of the brotherhood.

3. It was one of the privileges of a church to act for itself in excluding from its fellowship those whom it judged to be unworthy, and of course to act for itself in receiving into its fellow-

ship those whom it judged to be worthy. The rule of worthiness and unworthiness, it was not for any church to establish or to alter. The marks by which a church may judge of the fitness or unfitness of any individual for its communion, are not respectability, wealth, cultivation, intelligence, or anything else than simply the marks and signs of christian character. Every man who is "called to be a saint," who gives evidence that he is "sanctified in Christ Jesus," every man who shows himself to be sincerely and honestly a disciple of Christ and a friend and follower of the Savior, is a proper person to be included in the fellowship of a christian church; and to such a man no church can rightfully say, You shall not join with us. But on the other hand, I affirm that every church has the inalienable right to judge for itself, in the case of an accused member, whether he has forfeited the christian character; and that where christian character is forfeited, the church must act for itself in excluding the offender. And of course if the church has the right to judge for itself in regard to who shall be excluded, it must have the right to judge for itself in regard to who shall be received; the latter is involved in the former. There was a notorious offender in the church at Corinth. How was he to be put out of it? Paul writes to the whole church, declaring that in such cases they are to "judge," and

enjoining it upon them to proceed in full assembly to the act of casting him off. Why was this? Why but because the right of judging in regard to the admission or exclusion of members, belongs to the church and to no one else, not even an apostle.

These views suggest and illustrate the following remarks.

1. The only legitimate constitution of a church is the word of God. The word of God interpreted and applied by common sense, is the highest and only law by which the right and the wrong of the proceedings of any church are to be tested. Whatever the Bible requires or authorizes is constitutional in a church; whatever has no scriptural warrant is unconstitutional. The society of believers in Christ, which agrees to walk together by this rule is a church, and the Bible is its charter; and as a church it has no right to add to this rule or to limit or restrain its application.

We hear of the constitution of the Presbyterian church, and the constitution of the Methodist church, and we sometimes see such a document as the constitution of a Congregational church. What are these constitutions? Are they simply rules for the orderly transaction of business? If so, they are well enough, provided they do not encroach on the liberties of the church, or otherwise contravene the scriptures; but why

call them constitutions? Are the rules of the House of Representatives in Congress, the constitution of the house; or is the house constituted by the constitution of the nation? The use of such a word in such a connection is only fitted to mislead. It is a fundamental principle of the liberty of a church, that its only constitution is the Bible.

2. These views guard us against some not uncommon errors, respecting the nature and design of the written confessions of faith commonly used in our churches, at the public admission of members. They are not designed as standards, by which men are to be tried for heresy. This is one great use of confessions of faith in some other churches. There, when a charge of error in doctrine is preferred, the question is not whether the opinion charged as erroneous contradicts the Bible, but whether it contradicts the standard, to wit, the confession of faith. And the matter may be debated in an ecclesiastical body for days and weeks, while no man dares to inquire what does the Bible mean, because the only question to be settled is, what does the confession of faith mean. But in our churches there is no such thing. Here questions respecting truth and error in religious doctrine, are to be tried by the law and the testimony alone. A Congregational church, as it has no constitution but the Bible, has no standard but the oracles

of God. And if any other churches think they have a better standard, let them show if they can, wherein ours is insufficient.

Nor are these documents to be regarded as exhibiting all that the churches using them believe, or even all that they hold as of primary importance. There is not one among our churches, which does not regard the christian sabbath as an institution of divine authority, and essential to the prosperity and perpetuity, if not to the existence of religion ; there is not one which would not regard the rejection or violation of this institution by a church-member as a misdemeanor calling for immediate and most decided censure ; and yet I do not remember ever to have seen in one of these common professions of faith, any recognition of the doctrine of the sabbath.

Do you ask then, What is the use and meaning of these articles? I answer, Every man who makes a public profession of religion, must in some way make a public profession of faith in Christ and his gospel. This he may do either in his own words, or in the words of an instrument or writing drawn for the purpose by some other person. He may do it in a few words, or he may do it in many words. It ought to be done in such words and so many, as will make the act of profession most distinct, intelligible and impressive. It is convenient there-



fore, not to say necessary, that each should have some appropriate form of words, by which those received into communion may intelligently and solemnly profess their belief of the christian religion.\*

3. These views show what is the nature and use of a written church covenant. A church is instituted, by the members thereof agreeing to walk together, in obedience to the gospel, watching over and helping each other as brethren. This agreement may be expressed in words, or it may be implied, as in the churches of the Episcopal order, and in those of various other denominations, by their voluntarily submitting to some instituted form of church discipline, and statedly communing together in worship and in ordinances. But there is an obvious propriety in forming such a relation by means of some visible contract, and some solemn act of agreement. In the Congregational churches of England and Scotland, if I am rightly informed, the agreement is express and solemn, yet without any form of words: the candidate is introduced into a meeting of the brotherhood; is examined respecting his religious belief and experience; is received by vote, if the examination is approved; and then the transaction is closed, by the members

present giving him their right hands in sign of their fraternal recognition. But in our churches, the agreement of the members to walk together in church fellowship, is exhibited in that written document called the covenant, to which the members publicly express their assent at the organization of the church, and to which each member that is afterwards added, assents with like solemnities. In other words, the written covenant, like the written profession of faith, is a form. As the one is a form in which the candidate for church membership, expresses his belief in God, in the Lord Jesus, and in the great truths of the gospel; so the other is a form in which he expresses his vows and engagements to serve God, to trust and follow the Savior, and to walk with the church in all the duties of christian brotherhood.

4. These views illustrate what we may call the republicanism of christianity.

The gospel in its *doctrines* is a mighty leveler. Like its author, it respects not the persons of princes; but to the monarch and the slave it addresses the same charges of guilt, and offers the same forgiveness, and the same hope of immortality. So far as it gains its appropriate influence over men, it makes them feel that they are all alike. Just so, in its *institutions*, it puts all men on a level, and carefully respects the rights of all. It leads every man to think for himself. and bids every man act for himself. It

guards against priestcraft and spiritual domination, by the institution of churches with distinct independent and inalienable rights. It is this apostolic constitution, deciding that each church shall by the action of its members choose its own officers, decide on the admission of new members, and judge in respect to the excision of offenders—which has been the very root of the republican habits and republican intelligence of New England.

Stand fast then in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free. Stand fast in asserting the rights of the churches, as invaluable as they are inalienable. Stand for the right of each church to choose its own officers, the right of each church to decide by its free vote who shall be added to its communion, and the right of each church to determine who shall be excluded as unworthy. No matter who may be the men, or what the body of men, that would take these rights away—no matter by what venerable names they may be called—no matter by what beautiful theories of good government, or by what immemorial traditions they may attempt to sustain their claims—remember—I would say it to all the churches—remember that while these rights are yours to enjoy, they are not yours to surrender. Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free.

## CHAPTER II.

### *The Officers of a Church.*

"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." Philip. i. 1.

The nature, design and rights of a christian church have already been made the subjects of inquiry. I propose now to speak of a church as organized with its proper officers. In other words, our next inquiry is, What are the officers of a church, and what are their duties and powers?

Look at the inscription of the epistle to the Philippians, which we have placed at the head of this chapter. It introduces to our notice the church at Philippi with its officers; and it shows us also Paul and Timothy, the one the author of the epistle, and the other his associate and friend, who joins with him in christian salutations to their Philippian brethren. The reader, who looks at the words of this inscription in reference to the subject now to be considered, may be disposed to ask, first, whether Paul and Timothy were officers of a church.

To this question I answer, No. If you ask, What were they then? I answer again, One was an Apostle, the other an Evangelist; both were preachers of the gospel; both were minis-

ters, or as they expressed it, servants, of Jesus Christ; but neither as apostle and evangelist, nor as preachers and teachers of the christian religion, nor as the servants of the Savior, were they officers in any church. And I would make this proposition general. Neither an apostle, nor an evangelist, nor a preacher of the gospel, is, as such, an officer of any church.

In explanation and proof of this assertion, I offer two remarks.

1. It is one of the privileges of a church to elect its own officers. This I trust has been made already sufficiently plain. But there is proof enough in the New Testament, that men might preach the gospel, might become evangelists, and even apostles without the votes of any church.

2. There were apostles, evangelists, and other preachers of the gospel, before there was any organized church of which they could be officers; nay before the form in which christian societies should be constituted, was determined.

The mode in which Christ and his followers were associated during his ministry on earth, was not the model of a church. That little company was rather a family or a school, or both, than an ecclesiastical organization. The man of Nazareth appeared among his countrymen as a great and divine teacher of religious truth; and like other prophets and teachers, he had his retinue of fol-

lowers and immediate disciples who always accompanied him, and waited on him, and who formed one family of which he was the head. This was not a church; they all worshiped in the synagogues and in the temple, like other Jews; Jesus was the master and they were pupils in his family. In this family, Judas Iscariot was the steward who had the charge of their common purse, and provided the supplies for their common table. Out of this family, Christ selected twelve, who were to be the particular witnesses of his life, death, and resurrection, and whom he called apostles. Them he sent forth on one occasion, before his death, to perform a circuit through Judea and Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom. When they went on this business, of what churches were they officers, when as yet, not a church had ever been instituted? In what church—we might as well ask—was John the Baptist an officer?—or Isaiah the prophet? So on another occasion, Christ sent out seventy of his followers on a similar errand. In what church were they officers?

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, his apostles and other personal followers, while they waited at Jerusalem for the promised effusion of the Holy Spirit with his miraculous gifts, continued to live as before, in an association more like a family than like what was afterwards called a church. It was not till their numbers were

increased by thousands, and the need of some organization began to be felt, that anything like the institution of a distinct and permanent religious society, appears to have been definitely contemplated. And then, nothing more was done than was necessary in that present exigency. Thus the whole constitution of the church at Jerusalem grew up by degrees, as one step after another was called for by a succession of circumstances altogether peculiar. *When* the family became a church—when the daily worship in the temple, and the daily lectures of the apostles to the multitudes which gathered around them with one accord in Solomon's porch, and the meetings in private houses for prayer and the breaking of bread, became the regular religious institutions of a completely organized christian society, we have no occasion, even if it were in our power, to determine. It is enough for our present purpose to know that there were apostles and evangelists, and other preachers of the gospel, before there were churches; and that, therefore, neither the preacher nor the evangelist, nor the apostle, as such, is necessarily an officer in any church.

But you ask again, Had the apostles and evangelists, as such, no office? I reply, they had duties to perform, they had a ministry or service to fulfil, they had a gift which was in them by the laying on of the hands that conse-

erated them to the work of teaching ; and if this is what you mean by office, they had an office, the office of apostles and preachers ; still theirs you see was not an office in any church, but rather an office independent of the existence of all churches. Their duties were, to publish the gospel wherever they had an opportunity ; to give suitable instructions to inquirers and to converts ; to show to such as became christians, in what way, and under what organization, they might associate themselves for devotion and mutual benefit ; and finally to see to it that others of proper qualifications were introduced into the same ministry with themselves. They were Christ's servants, his messengers, sent abroad to teach all nations ; you may call their business an office if you will, but it was not an office which constituted any part of the organization of any of the churches.

You ask again, perhaps, Had these men no authority ? I answer, yes, all of them had the authority of truth and reason—what they showed from the ancient scriptures, or from the words of Christ, recorded, recollected, or reported, or from argument in any way, to be the word of God,—*that*, every man belonging to any church or to no church, *that*, every society of men, christian, Jewish, Pagan, was bound to respect, believe, and obey accordingly. Some of them had the authority which belongs to acknowledg-



ed wisdom and experience, and to great integrity and purity and devotion ; an authority like that which often leads you to receive the opinions of this man or that with great respect and deference, and perhaps with absolute confidence, even when you do not understand, and have not inquired after, the grounds on which that opinion rests. Some of them had an authority of another sort—the authority of inspiration ; they spoke as men directly commissioned from the Lord Jesus, and wrought miracles to show that what they said was to be received by all men implicitly, as the word of God. This was the authority of Paul and of Peter and of all the apostles, an authority like that of Elijah, or Isaiah, or of any other person acknowledged as inspired. This authority was one essential part of apostleship ; and if any man in these days, shall set up his claim to be regarded and honored as a legitimate successor to the authority of the apostles in and over the churches, we have only to say that we will acknowledge his claim, whenever he shall be able to appeal to us, as Paul appealed to the church at Corinth, “ Truly the SIGNS OF AN APOSTLE were wrought among you in all patience, in SIGNS AND WONDERS AND MIGHTY DEEDS.”

We proceed now to a second question. Are officers essential to the existence of a church ? I answer at once, No. To the being of a church,

officers are not essential ; to its completeness and well being they are. Hands are essential to a man's well being, but not to his existence. A man is a man with his hands cut off, though he is a man maimed. This shows what I mean when I say, the officers of a church are not essential to its being, though they are highly important to its well being. A church may be really a church without any of the officers instituted by the apostles in their churches.

Do you ask for proof? It is at hand. Paul and Barnabas in their first missionary tour from Antioch, passed through Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycoania, as is commonly supposed in the years 45 and 46. Sometime afterwards, in the year 48 or 49, as it is commonly reckoned, they returned that way, "confirming the souls of the disciples," and "ordaining them elders in every church." Read the epistles of Paul to the church at Corinth. The first was written about three years after his departure from that city ; and both were written before he had made them a second visit. He addresses them expressly as a church, and treats of a great variety of church matters ; but where are their officers? No salutation is sent, as in the case of the Philippians, to the bishops and deacons ; no mention is made of any elders ; no distinct allusion can be found that implies the existence of any church officers among them. Put these two things together,

first that Paul's custom was to ordain elders in the churches on his second visit, and secondly the fact that here is a church where the apostle had labored nearly two years, and from which he had been absent now three years, in which there is no sign of there having been any officers at all;—and are we not warranted in saying that the officers in a church are not essential to its existence, however important they may be to its prosperity or to its completeness.

But why is this proposition introduced here? Simply for the sake of one plain inference. Whatever may be our views of what church officers ought to be, we have no right to disown any church, to renounce fellowship with it, or to deny its being, merely because its officers are not scriptural, or even if it has no officers at all.

We are now prepared to inquire directly, What are the proper officers in a church? and what are their powers and duties? I answer, You have already seen what they were by name in the church at Philippi, to wit, bishops and deacons.

A few passages in the New Testament contain all the distinct information which we have, respecting the duties and powers of these officers. In the first epistle to Timothy, iii. 1—13, the qualifications proper to the bishop and to the deacon, are fully described. In the same epistle, v. 17, it is laid down as a rule that the

elders, who presided over the church were to have a full compensation, especially such of them as were devoted to the work of instruction in religion. In the epistle to Titus, i. 5—10, there is an abridged description of the proper character of elders, and especially of a bishop. In Acts xx, we have a summary of Paul's address to the elders of the church at Ephesus, who at his request had come to meet him at Miletus, in which he reminds them of their most important duties. A brief passage of the same kind occurs in 1 Peter, v. 1—4. In other places in the Acts, (xi. 30 ; xv. 2, 4, 6, 22.) the elders of the church at Jerusalem are mentioned as receiving the contributions forwarded for the relief of the needy there, and as consulting with the apostles and with the brotherhood respecting the interests of religion. And in the epistle to the Hebrews, xiii. 17, those christians are exhorted to obey their rulers or guides who spoke to them the word of God, and who watched for their souls as men that must give account. The knowledge contained in these various passages may be summed up thus.

1. The name *elder* seems to be, sometimes at least, a generic name for all church officers. (1.) Among the Jews almost every magistrate was called an elder, from the member of the great national council, down to the officer who kept order in the synagogue. What more

natural then, than that church officers of all sorts should sometimes be spoken of under this comprehensive designation? (2.) We never find the phrase 'bishops and elders' nor the phrase 'elders and deacons'; wherever the two sorts of officers are distinctly enumerated, they are enumerated, accurately, by their distinctive titles, "bishops and deacons." (3.) When the disciples at Antioch undertook to send relief to the brethren which dwelt in Judea, they "sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." To what elders? To those surely who had the charge of such matters, namely to the seven, or their successors. But however this may be, certain it is that the names bishop and elder are used frequently with reference to the same persons in the same office.

2. In regard to the duties and powers of the bishops, or overseers of a church, our information is sufficiently definite. It is their office to preside in the church; to do the work of a shepherd over the flock, who guides, oversees and supplies, who feeds the lambs and the sheep; to superintend the devotions of the church, its ordinances, its discipline, its instruction, all its interests and concerns. Their office is to teach and preach the gospel; for though a preacher is not of course a pastor and bishop, or a church officer at all, yet every pastor or bishop is by virtue of his office an authorized preacher of the

gospel. And this is their greatest and most important duty ; for though it be true that in the churches where there was a plurality of overseers, as was generally, not to say always, the case in the primitive churches, some addicted themselves particularly to one department of labor, and others to another—still there seems to be no reasonable doubt that the office of all was the same ; and what part of their common office can be compared in importance with the work of ministering statedly by “ word and doctrine,” to the conversion of the impenitent, and the instruction and sanctification of the church. To them, therefore, may be applied not only such apostolic exhortations as we find addressed specifically to elders and bishops, but all the instructions and counsels which were given to any other preachers in that particular capacity. It is their duty to “ take heed to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers, to feed the church of God.” It is no less the duty of such an officer in the church to “ be an example of the believers ;” to “ give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine ;” to “ meditate on these things, to give himself wholly to them that his profiting may appear to all ;”—he is “ rightly to divide the word of truth,” to “ be instant in season and out of season,” to “ reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine.”

3. Church officers of the other order are uniformly called in scripture, *deacons*, unless indeed—as has been suggested—they are, in some instances, included with officers of the former class under the more general appellation of “elders” or magistrates. They were originally appointed—if the sixth chapter of Acts is rightly interpreted—in the church at Jerusalem, to relieve the care and responsibility of those who there gave themselves to labor in word and doctrine; and they were to afford that relief especially, by administering aid in behalf of the church to its afflicted and needy members. This is still their appropriate duty, corresponding fully with Paul’s description of their qualifications. It is theirs to go—and as God often chooses the poor of this world to be rich in faith, it is often theirs to go—into the dwellings of poverty and sickness and distress, where the saints are found—to go there as the messengers of the church, bearing relief, and kind counsel, and hope and consolation. It is theirs too, obviously and as a matter of course, to be not only the almoners of the church to the poor, but, if need be, the advocates of the poor with the church. This entire interest and care is taken from the bishops and given to their guardianship. Such is their office,—no unhonored, insignificant, or trifling work;—an office which involves a standing and influence in the church, and a degree of confi-

dence on the part of the brethren, so considerable, that those who occupy such an office are of course in many other respects, the natural helpers and counselors of those who labor in word and doctrine. It is not without reason then that Paul requires these officers of the church to be "grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience," and to be furthermore men who have been "proved" in the church and have been "found blameless." It is not without reason that he adds, "They that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree,"—attain a high standing as christians—"and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Before leaving this division of our subject, I cannot but call the attention of the reader to two obvious yet important remarks.

1. There is no high church doctrine in the New Testament. I use this language with no individual reference to any denomination of christians. I do not mean by a high churchman, one who holds to this or that particular form of church order; for as I understand the word, there are high churchmen in every sect. By a high churchman, I mean any man, whether Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Congregationalist, who believes that his form of church organization has an exclusive divine right, and that every church



not formed exactly according to the pattern which he imagines he has seen in the mount, is guilty of schism, of usurpation, and of offering strange fire on the altar of God. Such a man finds himself constrained to stand aloof from all christian intercourse with those who are not of his ecclesiastical household, and to act as if his distinguishing principles of church order were of more importance than all the points of christian truth which he and the "dissenters," hold in common. It is in reference to this exclusiveness, wherever it may be found, that I say, there is no high church doctrine in the New Testament. Had a high churchman of any denomination presided over the composition of the New Testament or of any book in it, he would have had the subject of ecclesiastical institutions exhibited with great distinctness and minuteness; instead of having here and there a hint, and here and there a principle, we should have been blessed with a complete code of canon law;—and the new dispensation would have had, like the old, its book of Leviticus. To every high churchman, of whatever sect or party he may be, it may be said, Sir, you have overlooked the very nature and scope of christianity; you have lost sight of the great principle that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink," nor yet organization and order, "but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and you are to be refuted not

by proof texts showing that your plan of church government differs from the apostolic pattern, not by musty quotations from the fathers, and the early councils, but by an appeal to the first elements of the christian religion, and to the spirit and current of the scriptures.

2. Neither christian teachers, nor church officers, are invested with any mysterious or magical power. The power of the christian teacher is simply to teach christianity. The "servant of Jesus Christ" has no power but to show from the scriptures, and by appeals to the consciences of his hearers, what the will of God is, and what men must do. The authority of his preaching is the authority of the truth which he preaches, the authority of the message which he brings from God, and not the authority of any sacredness or divinity about his person. The power of church officers, is simply the power to perform in the church, certain specific and intelligible duties. Christianity, be it remembered, acknowledges no priesthood; no order of men whose office gives them any peculiar influence with God, or any nearer access to the Divinity than what belongs to all; no mediator between God and man but that one High Priest who, once for all, "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot unto God."

It falls in with the superstitious tendency of human nature, to suppose that there is attached

to the christian preacher or pastor, some peculiar priestly power ; that his prayers must needs have, by virtue of his sacred office, some special efficacy ; that his presence, and his voice, and his hand uplifted to bless, are ever accompanied with some mysterious energy. Taking advantage of this superstitious feeling so natural to the untaught and unthinking mind, men have gradually reared the whole fabric of popery. The idea of a priesthood standing between God and the people, as the authorized and only channel of God's favor, and holding in their hands the keys of life and death, is the very corner-stone of that spiritual Sodom. And how much that idea, and everything kindred to it, is at war with the genius and spirit of christianity, I need not attempt to show you. Keep your own mind clear from the infection of all such feelings.\*

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\* Note B.

## CHAPTER III.

### *Ordinances and Ceremonies.*

"Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them." Acts, xx, 7.

THE objects for which churches were instituted have been stated. (1.) Without some visible association of Christ's disciples, there could be no visible or permanent existence of christianity as a distinct religion. (2.) By the institution of churches, the social principles of human nature are brought to bear on the promotion of christian piety. (3.) Churches are associations for the mutual benefit of the members. (4.) By means of this institution, this visible brotherhood of them that believe, christians are enabled to operate more efficiently on the world around them. Accordingly, and as connected with all these objects, it enters radically into the idea of a church, that it is an association for communion in all the ordinances of christian worship, instruction, and edification. What are these ordinances? is the inquiry now proposed. And here, as in respect to the matters heretofore considered, our appeal must needs be to the scriptures; for there is the only authority. The question is, what religious institutions and ceremonies were observed as of divine authority, in the churches founded by the

apostles? This comprehensive question may be examined in several divisions.

I. What days were set apart for religious uses? I answer.

1. From the beginning, even from the time of Christ's resurrection, the first day of the week was observed as a religious day among all christians. Of this we have ample proof in the New Testament, and out of it. On the sabbath or seventh day of the week, the apostles, and the Jewish christians generally, joined with their countrymen in the worship of the synagogue. But on the first day of the week, which in memory of their Savior's triumph over death they called the Lord's day, they had their own worship in their own places of assembling. Of this I need recite but one example. Paul, though in great haste to arrive at Jerusalem, must needs stay at Troas seven days, evidently waiting for the stated full assembly of the christians of that neighborhood. On the first day of the week, the disciples came together, and he preached to them, ready to depart on the morrow. And that this first day of the week was not set apart merely as a day for religious meetings and social worship, but was regarded as a day to be observed by the christian in his solitude, will appear, I think, to be strongly intimated, by the manner in which it is mentioned in the introduction to John's apocalyptic visions. The apostle says

he "was in the spirit, on the Lord's day," when he heard the voice of him who is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and who commanded him to write those visions and send the record to the churches. Why was it on the Lord's day? Was it not because on that day, the soul of the aged and persecuted saint in his solitude, was more peculiarly alive to things invisible and eternal? Why mention that it was on the Lord's day? Why but because in all the churches that day was holy, and each disciple felt himself bound, in the words of one who lived about a century afterwards,\* to "observe the Lord's day, by casting out all evil thoughts and entertaining all good ones, glorifying the resurrection of the Lord on that day?"

But had the apostolic churches no calendar of fasts and festivals? I answer,

2. The New Testament gives us no intimation of any other *christian* religious day. The Jewish christians, like their unconverted countrymen, observed, while the temple was yet standing, all the great festivals of the ancient dispensation, especially the Passover and Pentecost; and as the first of these festivals was connected with the death and resurrection of their Savior, and the second with the descent of the Holy Spirit, it was natural that they should gradually learn to celebrate those occasions with

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\* Clemens of Alexandria.

some appropriate christian solemnities. Accordingly it appears to have been the general custom, at a very early period, to celebrate the day before the last and high day of the Passover week, as a fast in memory of Christ's crucifixion, and the day following the termination of the Passover as the anniversary of Christ's resurrection; and about a hundred years after the death of the apostles, the day of Pentecost was honored, in memory of the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost. What we call Christmas, or the supposed anniversary of Christ's nativity, was not celebrated till a much later period,—probably not till the beginning of the fourth century.

II. What were the acts of worship in which the churches united at their stated meetings on the Lord's day? The scriptures mention two, prayer and singing.

1. Paul seems to be speaking of the public worship of christians in their solemn church assemblies, when among other directions respecting church order, he says to Timothy, (1 Tim. ii. 1—8.) "I exhort that first of all," that is as a duty of primary importance, "supplications, prayers, and giving of thanks be made for all men,—for kings, and all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." "I will therefore that men pray every where"—i. e. in all the christian assemblies—"lifting up holy hands

without wrath and doubting." And how much the apostles and apostolic christians abounded in prayer, is evident enough to every man who reads the Acts and the Epistles. After the ascension of Christ, and before the descent of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost, we read that the apostles and other disciples, "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." So, after the three thousand had been added, we read of them that they "continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." So after Peter and John, having been arrested by the rulers, were dismissed as men whom it was best to let alone, and returning to their own company reported all that the chief priests and elders had said, we find recorded the unpremeditated language in which they expressed their devotions. And not to prolong this part of the discussion with unnecessary citations, it is enough to say that the apostles, and such as learned of them, prayed "always with all prayer,"—or more accurately, with all sorts of prayer; that is, in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, they made known their requests unto God.

2. In respect to singing, we find the apostles speaking thus. "Be filled with the spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your



hearts to the Lord." (Eph. v. 18—19.) "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Col. iii. 16.) And in one more instance,—“By Jesus therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” (Heb. xiii. 15.)

This singing, the music of the primitive christian assemblies, was the effusion and expression of devotional feeling on the part of the worshippers. It was not, as is the case in too many temples of modern christianity, a mere exhibition of skill on the part of the performers. It was a solemn act of worship, in which the soul rose up to God, and had communion with his Spirit. Nor is it to be doubted that as many as had voices to sing, regarded it as a duty and a privilege to bear a part, and to qualify themselves for bearing a part in the delightful hymns of God's worship. With them too, as appears from the christian writings of the first three centuries, the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, was not for the church or for the Lord's day alone ; it was a part of the worship in their families, and when they happened to meet together. Their hymns cheered them in their toils, gave variety and devotion to their social intercourse, and spread the spirit of their

religion over all their employments and all their joys and sorrows. The song of christian joy and praise rose like angel notes, from the solitudes and tombs where the persecuted hid themselves, from the dark cell of the imprisoned, and from amid the agonies of the martyr.\* And this it was, which gave to their religion, in the sight of their enemies, a strange aspect of cheerfulness and triumph.

Would it were more so among us. With us music is generally esteemed an important part of a polished education, and especially important in the education of daughters. It is an art taught scientifically by skillful professors. Time, labor, and money are expended prodigally to acquire so valued an accomplishment. But why? To what uses are this knowledge and skill applied, when acquired? How many are there, children of christian parents, if not themselves church members, who would deem it quite beneath them to use this dear bought accomplishment in the worship of God. Psalm-sing-

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\* "A sweet and solemn breathing strain  
Piercing the flames, untremulous and clear!  
The rich triumphal tones! —————  
Man's voice was there—a clarion voice to cheer  
In the mid-battle—ay, to turn the flying—  
Woman's--that might have sung of heaven beside the dying.  
It was a fearful, yet a glorious thing,  
To hear that hymn of martyrdom, and know  
That its glad stream of melody could spring  
Up from the unsounded depths of human wo."—*Hemans*.

ing is not for them. Their voices help not to swell the tide of song in the sanctuary. Their songs are not the songs of Zion.

Frequent mention is made of both these parts of worship, in the writings of the early christian fathers. And though the authority of the writers who immediately followed the apostles, can make nothing binding which is not enforced by the authority of the scriptures ; it is interesting to know that the particular conclusions respecting primitive modes of worship, which can be gathered out of the writings of the first three centuries, are generally accordant with the conclusions to be derived from the New Testament. These conclusions, as they have been gathered by men best qualified in respect to learning, skill, and impartiality, may be most clearly exhibited in brief answers to a few common questions.

1. Was social prayer confined to consecrated places, and to the stated Lord's day assemblies ? By no means. Read the Acts of the apostles, and see if every occasion of interest was not then deemed an occasion for prayer. James had been killed with the sword ; Peter was in prison also, and king and people were waiting for the day in which he too should be put to death. In this emergency, prayer was offered to God in his behalf by the church, *without ceasing*. (Acts xii. 5.) When ? where ? and how ? Was this unceasing prayer offered in the

temple? Was it on the first day of the week only? Was it only when the whole church was formally assembled? Let us see. On the night before his expected execution, God by a miracle answered these prayers, and set the apostle at liberty. At once he proceeded to the house of Mary the mother of Mark "where many were gathered together praying." What sort of a meeting was this? Was it the stated assembly of the church, at its accustomed place, on the Lord's day? But where were the apostles, who at that time presided in that church, and gave themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word? They were not present at this meeting; for no sooner had Peter told the astonished company how the Lord had delivered him, than he added, "Go show these things unto James and the brethren." What sort of meeting, then was it, which was held by night at the house of that widow, Mary the mother of Mark? Why it was just what in these days would be called a prayer-meeting in a private house. So when Paul, journeying towards Jerusalem, and incidentally stopping a few days at Tyre, had found disciples there, and had formed with them a brief but happy acquaintance, they all, when he was about to leave them, followed him out of the city, with their wives and children, to the place of embarkation, and ere the parting salutations

were exchanged, they "kneeled down on the shore and prayed." Does this look as if the apostles thought there ought to be no social prayer, save in a consecrated building, and on a consecrated day? Nor is there anything in the writings of the following age to show that any such chilling formalities restrained the simple fervency of primitive devotion.

2. What was the posture of the worshippers? Frequently they kneeled in prayer, as when Paul and the Tyrian disciples kneeled down on the shore and prayed. At other times they stood, like the publican in the temple who stood afar off and smote upon his breast. On the Lord's day, and in their public assemblies, the primitive christians generally—if not always—stood up to join in prayer. They thought that kneeling was unsuitable to a day so full of joy and triumph as the day of Christ's resurrection. Especially when the circumstances of devotion began to be regarded with some degree of superstition, they not only rose up for prayer, but turned their faces upwards, and stretched out their hands in the attitude of supplication. Whether we pray kneeling or standing, is obviously of little importance. This however may deserve some attention, namely, whether the practice of sitting down to pray, does not betray in persons who have health to stand for every thing else, a spirit of self-indulgence somewhat inconsistent with the spirit of devotion.

3. Was prayer offered by the responding or commingling voices of the assembly? All the instances of responsive worship, or of worship in which the voices of the whole assembly were mingled, of which we have an account in the scriptures, seem to belong rather to singing than to prayer. Accordingly it is reported as the testimony of the fathers no less than of the New Testament, that in the primitive churches, the presiding officer or some other person under his direction, led the devotions of the assembly, and that the other worshipers only responded with the word *Amen* at the close, expressing their participation in what was said.

4. Were prayers offered from a book, or according to any prescribed form? The Lord's prayer appears to have been frequently used as a form, but it was repeated from memory, not read from a book. As for any other form of prayer there is no proof that any such was used during the first three centuries, unless perhaps when a minister composed a form for himself and used it in his own congregation. The idea of a liturgy, in the modern sense of that word, was utterly unknown to the primitive churches.

III. What were the methods of instruction and exhortation in the primitive churches.

A church not yet organized by the appointment of bishops and deacons—as was the case with the church at Corinth when Paul addressed

to it his two epistles—seems to have been little else than a school of mutual instruction, especially when no apostle or evangelist was present to conduct their exercises. Out of this grew those evils in the church at Corinth, which the apostle corrects in the twelfth and fourteenth chapters of his first epistle. But after a church had been, in the apostolic phrase, “confirmed” by the ordination of officers, the bishops presided over this as well as over all the other interests of the community. In this department of the church service two things were included.

1. The *reading* of the scriptures. “Till I come,” says Paul to Timothy, “give attendance to reading,”—that is, to the public reading of the scriptures. This held a much more prominent place in the primitive churches than in ours. Then, owing to the scarcity of books and comparatively small number of persons able to read for themselves, christians generally were under the necessity of depending very much on this ordinance of public reading for a familiarity with the facts and language of the scriptures.

2. *Preaching* was not in the primitive churches exactly what it is with us. The preacher, who was either the bishop or some person designated by him, followed the reader—as Christ did in the synagogue at Capernaum, (Luke iv. 20—22.) or Paul in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, (Acts xiii. 16.) and the sermon was

usually an exposition of some parts of what had been read, with a warm exhortation, urging to the practice of christian holiness.

IV. What were the peculiar symbolical ceremonies observed in the apostolic churches ; and what was their import ?

These ceremonies were three, *Baptism*, the *Lord's Supper*, and *Ordination*.

1. In the ordinance of BAPTISM, water was applied to signify the engagement of the person to lead a new and holy life as Christ's disciple. The ceremony was a form of consecration, signifying that thenceforward the person belonged to God, and to Christ, and was devoted to be the dwelling of the Holy Ghost.

As to the *mode* in which the apostles baptized, the most obvious remark is, that they do not seem to have been very particular. Often the ceremony was performed in the open air, and with the waters of a running stream. But always it was performed with a promptness, and an evident ease and convenience, altogether inconsistent with the idea that the total submersion of the body was indispensable to the ceremony.

As to the persons who were the *subjects* of this ceremony, I will only say that the more I consider the express allusions to this matter in the New Testament, the ideas which were necessarily current among all the Jews, in regard to the privileges of a family covenant with God,



and the total absence of all controversy about infant baptism in the primitive churches ; the more assured I am, that the parent often, if not always, brought his children with him to the water of baptism, thus dedicating them to the God and Savior to whom he consecrated his own existence.

As to the persons *by whom* this ceremony was performed, I will say, in one word, that this, evidently, was deemed a matter of little consequence. Paul thought that the ordinance of baptism was among the least of his duties as a minister of the gospel. [1 Cor. i. 14—17.] I find nothing in the Bible, and nothing in what I have seen of the earliest christian writers, which implies that it was the peculiar duty, or the peculiar honor, of this or that officer, to administer baptism.

2. The LORD'S SUPPER was simply eating bread and drinking wine, with prayer and thanksgiving, in commemoration of the death of Christ. This ordinance seems to have been a part of the services of every Lord's day. It was a ceremony reminding the disciples of their relation to their common Lord, and what he had done and suffered in their behalf, of their connection with each other, and of the hopes which he had led them to cherish. This was all. It was indeed a bond of fellowship, an act of visible communion with each other as fellow disciples. And so

it was no less an act of profession, setting forth their discipleship and their confidence in their Redeemer. And it was also a means of improvement in faith, in love, in all the graces of piety. But how was it a bond of fellowship? How an act of profession? How a means of improvement? Why, simply because it was the religious commemoration of that great event, the memory of which was so full of the most thrilling, melting, adoring affections; the death of Christ. "This do," said the Savior, "in remembrance of me." "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup," says Paul, "ye do show the Lord's death till he come."

Where there were church officers, there the bishops presided over this, as over every other part of public worship. To preside over the church at the Lord's table, belongs to their office, as obviously, as to preside over the prayers of the church or over the public reading and expounding of the scriptures, or over the debates of a meeting for church business. But where there were no officers, the organization of the church being, as at Corinth when Paul wrote his epistlès, not yet completed; there is no evidence that this commemoration of Christ was omitted, any more than prayer and singing.

3. **ORDINATION** was simply the public inauguration of a man to a particular work or office. It seems to have been done uniformly with

prayer and the laying on of hands. The imposition of hands is an ancient oriental form of benediction. Thus "Jacob when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph." Thus, little children were brought to Jesus in the days of his flesh, "that he should put his hands on them and pray," and after reproving his disciples for their interference, "he laid his hands on them." This benediction,—this solemn commendation of the individual to the grace and blessing of God—is all that was meant by the imposition of hands in the inauguration of church officers, or in the setting apart of a christian teacher to the sacred employment of preaching the gospel. The idea of any sacerdotal power or divine virtue transfused into the candidate through the hands of the ordaining bishop or the presbytery, is a popish fancy, unworthy of an "age of bibles," and unknown to the simplicity and spirituality of the primitive times.

What then have we learned respecting the religious ordinances and ceremonies of the primitive christians? The first day of the week was their only sacred day. On that day they met for the worship of God by prayer and the singing of Psalms, for the reading of the scriptures, and to hear the exposition of christian doctrine from their teachers. Converts from the idolatrous and unbelieving world, were received into the number of visible christians, by the religious application of

water to their persons, in the ceremony of baptism, a ceremony which consecrated them to the love and service of God in Christ, and laid them under the most solemn pledge to walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. And remembering that the promise was to them and to their children, they were wont, by the same form of consecration and of covenant, to dedicate their little ones to God, pledging themselves to train them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In their assemblies, they celebrated the death of their Savior, and sought to quicken their own and each other's sense of obligation to one who was to them exceedingly precious, by eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of him. And finally, those who were appointed to office in their churches, or who were set apart to the business of preaching the gospel, were inducted into their work by public prayer and by the laying on of the hands of benediction. This, so far as we can discover, was the entire ritual of primitive christianity. What ought you to learn from these views?

1. Notice distinctly, and impress upon your mind, the simplicity of christian institutions. How strong the contrast between what we have just been looking at, and the ritual of Judaism. Where are the ministering Levites? Where the wreathed trumpets? where the white-robed priests and the bleeding victims? where the high

priest with his splendid vestments, and the mystic light of his breast plate? Where the wall of separation between the unblessed Gentiles and the holy seed, and that between the priesthood and the people? Where the most holy place with its ark and its mercy-seat and its golden cherubims? How far do the few and simple ordinances of christianity depart from the pomp, the splendor, the mystic ceremonies of the ancient dispensation. Christianity is not a religion of ceremonies, and dim mysterious symbols. It is a religion not of shadows but of light. It deals not in obscure intimations and foretokenings of things not yet fully revealed; it has nothing to do with types but as fulfilled and finished. It is a religion of truth, and motives, and spiritual influences; and it acknowledges no ornament but perfect simplicity.

Enter now a Roman Catholic place of worship. Look round upon the walls and niches of the lofty temple, alive, as it were, with pictures and statuary. Observe the gorgeous robes of the priesthood, the fuming censers, the crucifix, the altar, the propitiatory offering. See the multitude worshipping with genuflections, and crossings, and the counting of beads; and moved, not by intelligent appeals to conscience and to the spiritual faculties, but by the pomp and glare that dazzle the senses; and by the paintings, the combination of thrilling and imposing sounds, and the

“dim religious light” that excite the imagination. Is this the spirituality and simplicity of christian worship? Does this bear any resemblance, think you, to the worship which was offered at Troas, when the disciples came together to break bread, and Paul preached to them? This mummery and parade, this theatrical splendor, this strong appeal through the bewildered sense to the awed and superstitious imagination; this mixture of rites borrowed from an accursed paganism, with the once sacred but now abrogated pomp of Judaism,—is this the ritual of christianity?

2. Observe what constitutes the validity of christian ordinances. In certain quarters, we hear a constant cry of Validity! validity! Valid ministrations! Invalid ordinances!—and the changes on a few such phrases are rung with a diligence as indefatigable, and with a zeal as fervid, as if the world’s salvation was at issue. Now what is this validity? What constitutes the observance of christian ordinances valid, or invalid? One of these ordinances is the ordinance of the christian sabbath. The first day of the week is set apart for public worship and for private meditation and devotion; and it is as true now, as it was under the ancient dispensation that the sabbath was made for man. The day is consecrated, that it may be a means of spiritual good to such as use it aright. Now tell us, what is a

valid keeping of the sabbath ? What can it be, but such a sabbath-keeping as answers the end of the institution ? Social prayer is another of these ordinances ; and the praise of God in psalms and spiritual songs is another. What constitutes the validity of praying and devotional singing ? If the worshipers are sincere and penitent in the confession of sin, if they are fervent in their supplications, if they come boldly to the throne of grace, believing in Christ as the all-powerful and only mediator ; if in their singing, they make melody in their hearts unto God ; is any thing wanting to the validity of their worship ? Preaching is the great ordinance of the christian religion ; it is beseeching men and praying them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God ; it is a setting forth of the terms of pardon, and a summons to repentance. What makes preaching valid ? Is not the earnest, clear, convincing exhibition of God's truth valid preaching, let it come from what lips it may ? If a man shall preach divine truth, and shall prove it from the scriptures to be truth divine, and shall urge it on men's consciences with fervor and power, shall any circumstance in respect to his introduction into the work of preaching, make the truth of God of none effect ? If a sinner hears the offer of salvation ; if he perceives that the doctrine of the preacher, and the invitation set forth in the discourse, are fully accordant with

the scriptures ; and if with this divine light beaming on his mind and conscience, he repents and embraces the Savior ; shall he fail of being reconciled to God because the preacher was not properly ordained ? Another christian ordinance is baptism. In baptism, an act of dedication is performed ; a contract is made ; an engagement is undertaken ; a solemn pledge is given to God and to his people ;—What makes it valid ? What constitutes the validity of an oath, or any other solemn promise ? If you know what makes an oath binding in the sight of God, you know what makes the pledge given in baptism valid. The devout commemoration of the death of Christ, by eating bread and drinking wine, is another ordinance of the christian religion. Can you tell wherein consists the validity of a commemoration ? The inauguration of church officers and of christian teachers, by prayer and the laying on of hands, may be considered as another ordinance. It is a ceremony in which a church officer or preacher of the gospel, is publicly recognized as called to his work, and publicly commended to the blessing of God. If a man is found in the performance of such a work in the kingdom of God, and if he show himself qualified, diligent, and successful, does not common sense pronounce it idle, and worse than idle, to raise questions and



strifes about the circumstances of his inauguration ?\*

3. Observe in what way you are to derive advantage from christian ordinances. How can you make these ordinances profitable to you ? Not by depending on them to do you good mechanically, or like a medicine. Not by regarding them, with a blind and superstitious feeling, as the channels through which some miraculous influence shall flow down to bless you. Not by dreaming that they are to operate like a charm, or by some magical power. Every such notion dishonors God. Every such notion is little better than idolatry. Remember, these ordinances are to operate only as means of moral influence ; they are employed indeed, and made effectual, by the Holy Spirit that seals and sanctifies the heirs of salvation ; but that Divine Spirit employs them only because they are in their nature, as moral means, adapted to their end. Remember they are to do you good only as they enlighten your mind, or quicken your conscience, or waken within you by the power of association, or of sympathy, or of persuasion, feelings of devotion ; and thus lead you to a higher measure of that holiness which consists in will-

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\* Nothing that is here said, can be fairly understood as an apology for irregularity and confusion. There is a "divine right" for having "all things done decently and in order." See Note C.

ing subjection to the truth, and in active and supreme devotedness to God. There is no magic in the sweet light and the balmy air of a still summer sabbath, to fit you for heaven. If you are to profit by the sabbath, you must diligently employ its consecrated hours in acts of intelligent and earnest devotion. There is nothing in the walls and seats of the house of God, nothing in the sound of prayer and preaching, to do you any good when you merely put yourself in the way of being the passive subject of their influence. If you are to derive any benefit from your attendance on public worship, you must be not a bystander but an actor; your spirit must mingle with the spirits of God's people in their prayers and songs; you must not only hear the prayer, but you must make it your own; you must not only listen to psalms of praise, but in your own heart you must make melody unto God. So in regard to preaching, you must be not a forgetful hearer, but an attentive, reflecting, active doer of the word; and all your hearing must be in order to doing. There is nothing in the water of baptism, by whomsoever administered, or in whatever quantity, which can do you or your children the least possible good, without intelligent action on your part. If your children are to derive any benefit from the baptismal font, it must be because you intelligently dedicate them to the God of Abra-

ham, laying hold on his promises by faith, and binding yourself by an irrevocable pledge to train them for his service. There is nothing in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, more than in other bread and wine, that your mere eating and drinking should benefit your soul. If you are to derive any benefit from that ordinance, it must be such benefit as is the natural consequence of an intelligent, believing, and devout commemoration of the death of Him who gave himself a ransom for our sins. Remember all these ordinances are valuable to you, only as by a moral influence they stimulate you, and confirm you in a holy, self-denying, heavenly way of living. Use them as moral means to such an end ; and you use them aright. Use them in any other way ; and you pervert them,—perhaps to your own undoing.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *Duties of Church-Members.*

"We being many are one body, in Christ, and every one members one of another."  
Rom. xii. 5.

ALL the followers of Christ, throughout the world, are sometimes spoken of in the New Testament, as "the general assembly, and church of the first born whose names are written in heaven." They are spoken of as sustaining to each other the relation of brotherhood, as having common interests and hopes, as bound together by mutual duties and affections, as following a common leader, and united to a common head, and thus as constituting, wherever they are scattered over the world, one great communion. This great and comprehensive fellowship, including not only all the believers in particular churches, but all who on account of their situation or peculiar circumstances have never yet become members of any local christian body,—this community including individuals of every people and kindred to which the gospel has ever been preached—is what is called, figuratively, the church universal.

To this communion, the universal brotherhood of Christ's disciples, the kingdom of God on earth, does the apostle refer when he says, "As

we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office ; so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." He would have every christian remember that he is one of the great host of the redeemed, one of the vast company of Christ's servants, and thus set himself diligently to do, for the advancement of the common cause, for the promotion of God's kingdom and the benefit of God's people, just that which he has the opportunity and the ability of doing. He compares this great community to the system of the human body, made up of many parts, of which each part has its own particular work, and in which the healthful action of each part is essential to the well being of the whole and of every other part. In the context he applies this idea with much particularity. Every one, whatever his endowments, or his opportunities for usefulness, is exhorted to use them to the best advantage, and with diligence, for the common benefit ; and to fulfil the duties of his own station in the kingdom of Christ, without ambitiously encroaching on the allotted sphere of others.

Now if this comparison is applicable to the great community of Christ's disciples, the church universal ; how much more applicable is it to a particular church, a compact and local body of believers, associating themselves for special commun-

ion in the gospel. With how much more emphasis, may the members of a church say, As we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. And how peculiarly applicable to them in their common and mutual relations, are those exhortations to duty which Paul enforces by this comparison.

I propose now to consider the duties which the members of a church owe to each other. The church is one body having many members; in which every member owes certain duties to the brotherhood, taken collectively, and certain other duties to each brother individually. These two classes of obligations may be noticed separately.

I. What are the duties which each individual owes to the whole body taken collectively?

1. Every member should take pains to interest himself in the well being of the church. This is implied in the very nature of the institution; for why are these persons associated, if they are not to take a lively interest in the promotion of those ends at which the institution aims, and in the attainment of which its well being consists? If the members are not bound to make themselves acquainted with the state of the church, to know whether the common standard of christian attainments and christian prac-

tice is high or low, and in a word to concern themselves with whatever concerns the well being of the spiritual body to which they belong—why should they be united in a church at all?

2. Every member is under obligation to unite with the church in its worship and ordinances. I mean, he is to walk with the church to which he belongs, in obedience to all the laws and institutions of Christ. It is not enough that he attends public worship somewhere every sabbath, and partakes of the Lord's Supper at stated periods. He ought to be found every Lord's day, in his own place, among the brethren with whom he has entered into covenant. Nothing but some arrangement of Providence should make his seat empty, either at the table of the Lord, or in the sanctuary. If this is not so, if the members of the same church are not bound to commune together statedly and constantly in worship and in ordinances, the church which actually worships God and celebrates the death of Christ, is not a society permanently and solemnly bound together; it is only a fortuitous assembly of persons who have been brought together on this occasion by caprice, and who at the next time of meeting may be scattered to the four winds. Was not the church at Cenchrea distinct from the neighboring church in Corinth? Had not each of those churches its own members who were not the members of the other?

How can any church meet to worship God, and to observe his ordinances, unless its members come together? And if one member is entirely at liberty to go any where else, whenever the whim takes him, why not another?—why not all?

This plain principle is often transgressed from thoughtlessness. A member of the church has a curiosity to go to some other place of worship;—some peculiar ceremony is to be witnessed, or some new voice is to be heard,—or perhaps the idea suggests itself that a change of place for a sabbath or for half a sabbath would be pleasant. Under some such motive you leave your own place of worship and go to another, not dreaming that so small a thing can be of any consequence. But if you may do so once without some extraordinary reason, why may you not do it twice, and again and again, till it comes to pass that your seat is vacant no small portion of the time? And what is the effect of all this? Some, perhaps, who see only that you are not in your place, do not know where you are; to them it is as if you were at home neglecting entirely the institutions of public worship, and your example teaches them to do likewise. Others perhaps know the fact that you are strolling from one place to another to indulge your “itching ears;” to them it is as if you were to make a declaration that you do not respect or value your own church and minister, and your exam-



ple, so far as it has any influence, tends to disturb the church, and to unsettle the congregation.

3. Each member is bound to employ for the common benefit, whatever gifts God has imparted to him. The design of the church is mutual improvement and co-operation—mutual incitement to love and good works—mutual advancement in holiness—concentrated and invigorated effort for the promotion of the gospel of Christ. Towards the attainment of these ends each member ought to contribute his proportion of influence and effort. A duty of this kind rests on every believer simply as a christian, anterior to his connection with any particular church. On every believer there is an obligation to do whatever his particular talents and opportunities enable him to do, whether for the improvement of those brethren of the household of faith whom his influence can reach, or for the extension of the kingdom of Christ. This duty Paul, urges on the christians residing at Rome; and he enforces it by the illustration already referred to.\*

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\* See Romans xii; 4—8. "As we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then, gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophesy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth on teaching; or he that exhorteth on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he

Some, in that age, were endowed by the Spirit with gifts for the public exposition of the word of God ; some were commissioned to this or that peculiar service, to carry the gospel into other regions, or to bear contributions from distant places to the needy disciples at Jerusalem ; some had abilities to teach the inquiring heathen, or the half instructed convert, or the children of believers ; some were skillful to exhort the brethren, either in meetings or in private conversation ; —others had other faculties ; they were able to bestow their bounty on the poor, or to supply the resources by which apostles and evangelists should be carried forward in their journeys ; or by their talents for business they could advantageously manage this or that concern of public interest ; or with kind and self denying assiduity they could visit the sick and cheer the afflicted. It

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that ruleth, with diligence ; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness."

The writer is perfectly aware that the construction which he has given to this passage, is not the common one ; nor does he suppose that it will not encounter some serious objections. This is not the place for a philological examination of the Greek words and phrases, on which the sense of the passage turns. I will therefore only say that the apostle is not speaking of offices but of gifts : and that the current of discourse and exhortation, in this and the following chapters, has respect not to the duties of bishops and deacons, of elders in the church, and ministers of the word, but to the duties of christians as separated from the world, and as being one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

belongs to every christian, simply as a believer in Christ, to do good, according to his abilities and advantages, to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. But in the first epistle to the Corinthians, (xii. 12—27.) the apostle uses the same illustration with a special reference to the mutual relations of those christians as members of the same church. He tells them “Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” He exhorts them, (xiv. 12.) “Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.”

Indeed what can be more natural, or more beautiful, than the performance of this duty in a christian church. One brother, by his opportunities and abilities and his extensive knowledge of the scriptures, is qualified to teach; let him have a Bible class. Others, younger and less experienced, have the same gift in an inferior degree; let them do their best in the sabbath school. Some have the gifts which qualify them to lead a circle of praying souls near to the throne of grace, or to stir up the hearts of brethren by words of exhortation; let them be active in meetings for prayer and conference. Others can search out the needy around them, those who are suffering from cold, or hunger, or sickness, and can relieve them from their own resources, or solicit in their behalf the bounty of such as are more wealthy. Others can visit the sick with personal assiduity, and the afflicted

with consolations from the eternal fountains. Others have what are sometimes called business talents; they can offer judicious counsel in church meetings; or they can see to the details of this or that particular enterprize. Others have wealth and in the use of that they can prove themselves the stewards of God, and promote both the outward visible prosperity and the internal spiritual edification of the church. Thus every member, whether he have only one gift, and that the humblest, or whether he have many and all ample, is bound to employ whatever gifts God has bestowed upon him, for the common benefit of the church with which he is connected.

4. Another duty which each member owes to the church, is the duty of affording, according to his ability, all needful and proper aid to the officers of the church.

To the pastor, how important is that aid which may be rendered by able and faithful church members. How much can they do to promote the influence of his preaching, by promoting the mutual confidence and attachment between him and his flock. How much can they do to make him acquainted with the wants of his people, the errors, doctrinal and practical, which creep in from time to time, and the misapprehensions and prejudices which obstruct the progress of the truth among them. How much

can they do to hold up his hands when he is weary, to encourage him when he is ready to faint, to call down upon his person and his labors those blessings which are given in answer to prayer. How much can they do to extend his usefulness by persuading the indifferent to attend upon his ministry—how much by seeking out any who are affected under the preaching of the word, and introducing them to his notice that he may follow up by personal and private exhortation, the impression produced from the pulpit. How much can they do for him by showing, not to him only but to others, that they esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake, (1. Thes. v. 12, 13.) and by vindicating his character, when it is assailed in their presence with sly insinuations or with open calumny—unless indeed, as is often the case, the attack should be such as to carry with it its own refutation.

How much church-members may do to promote the efficiency and usefulness of the deacon's office, by seeing to it that the treasury which the deacons keep, is well supplied and constantly, and by seeking out, as opportunity offers, the sick the afflicted and the helpless, and making the deacons acquainted with every case which calls for their interposition; it can hardly be necessary for me to intimate.

5. It is the duty of every church-member to be a stated attendant on all the meetings of the

church. If the church has meetings for prayer—and what church ought not to have frequent meetings for prayer, besides the great assembly on the Lord's day?—at such meetings he ought to be found; for those exercises are as necessary for him as for others; and is not his presence to pour out his spirit in the prayers of the united church, as important as the presence of others? If the church has meetings for business, either stated or occasional, he ought to be there; for the business there transacted, is business of no small importance, and he is in fact responsible for whatever is done in his unnecessary absence. Whatever is done, he ought to be there to sanction it by his concurrence if it be right; or to dissuade from it, and when needful to protest against it, if it be wrong. He ought to be there, for, though he be weak, and ignorant, and humble, it is possible that he alone may carry thither the information which will be needed to solve some difficulty; it is possible that to his mind may be suggested the thought that shall prevent or settle some rising dissension.

I would by no means be supposed to intimate that the aged brother, or the invalid, whose infirmities forbid him to take a part in the business of the church, is to be reproached. But I may say that those who are young enough, and well enough to attend to worldly business, and to follow their farms and their merchandise without

interruption, are young enough not to be excused on account of age, and well enough not to be excused on account of sickness, from the duty of aiding the church in its meetings for business.

Here let me add, as the result of my own observation respecting frequent meetings of the brethren for the transaction of church business, and for free inquiry and conversation on whatever relates to their duties and interests as a body, that the tendency of such meetings, properly conducted, is invaluable. So powerful is the influence of such meetings to promote harmony of views and feelings, mutual confidence and affection, activity in church business, and the prompt removal of offenses, that, in my view, any scheme of church order which dispenses with such meetings, or which makes them rare and confines them to the single work of electing officers, is, on that account, exceedingly objectionable.

6. Every member of a church is under obligation to be obedient and submissive to his brethren in the Lord. He is under obligation to "hear the church," to attend to their advice, their counsels, their admonitions if they find occasion to bestow them. If he falls into sin, openly dishonoring the Savior, the church is bound to call him to account, and he is under equal obligation to confess his fault and be sub-

missive to their judgment. And on all occasions he ought to regard with serious and affectionate deference the opinions of his assembled brethren, never setting up his own opinion against theirs, and adhering to it with a dogged pertinacity, as if he were infallible. No church-member ought ever to forget Peter's exhortation, "Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder : yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility."

II. What are the duties which the members of a church owe to each other individually ?

1. The first and most comprehensive of these duties is *love*, mutual christian affection. "Love to the brethren" is a mark of christian character ; and surely if that love ought to operate anywhere with peculiar fervency, it should so operate among those believers who are thus united together for common and mutual improvement, who worship at the same altar, who celebrate in the same place the love and praise of their Savior, who have the same spiritual interests, and who are united in so many serious duties and endearing relations.

2. Another duty which the members of a church owe to each other in a peculiar measure, is the duty of *mutual watchfulness*. This is a duty which all the followers of Christ owe to each other, inasmuch as it is included in the duty of brotherly love. Every christian is



under obligation, as he has opportunity, to watch over his fellow christian in love. If he sees his brother falling into sin, he is of course bound to do whatever he can, to restore that brother to the way of holiness. But between brethren bound together by the same covenant, habitually worshipping together their common Lord and Savior, and associated expressly for mutual improvement, this duty of mutual watchfulness has an increased and peculiar importance. Brethren thus related are under peculiar obligations to be always "looking diligently lest any man among them fail of the grace of God ; lest any root of bitterness springing up among them, trouble them, and thereby many be corrupted ; lest there be any fornicator or profane person, as Esau who for a morsel of food sold his birth-right."

3. With this mutual watchfulness they are bound to unite *mutual forbearance and forgiveness*. "I beseech you" says Paul to the saints at Ephesus, "that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." And to the Colossians he says, "Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering ; forbearing one another, forgiving

one another; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Such is the spirit which all christians—all men indeed—ought to exercise toward each other; and by this spirit the mutual intercourse of those christians who are thus especially related to each other, ought, eminently, to be characterized.

4. Another duty which the members of a church are bound by the law of love to render to each other, according to their opportunities and abilities, is the duty of *mutual exhortation and incitement*. "Comfort yourselves together," says Paul to the church of the Thessalonians, "and edify one another, even as also ye do." To "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse," he says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." To another community of christians he says, in one place, "Exhort one another while it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,"—and in another place, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another." All these apostolic directions point to a certain specific and intelligible duty—a duty binding on all christians in a general sense, but obviously binding in a pecu-

liar sense on those christians who are peculiarly related. That duty I have called the duty of mutual exhortation and incitement. You may call it by what name you please, but you cannot change its nature or its obligation. The duty in one form or another is inseparable from the relation of church-members to each other.

5. The members of a church owe to each other individually all necessary and reasonable *assistance, temporal as well as spiritual*. They are to "bear one anothers burthens and so fulfil the law of Christ." They are to pray for one another. They are to render to each other as occasion offers, all the offices of christian friendship. If one of the members suffer, shall not the others suffer with him? If one is sick or in affliction, shall not the others visit him and pray with him and for him? Yet how often is this duty neglected. How often may it happen that a brother is sick in the same street with yourself, and you pass by the door of his humble dwelling every day; and yet you never kneel by his lowly couch to pray, you never light up his uncomfortable and cheerless apartment with the smiles of christian friendship, you never inquire into his necessities, or do any thing for their relief, save what passes through the hands of the deacons. If one member is in want, shall not the others relieve him? If one is embarrassed and distressed, shall not the others af-

ford him not sympathy only, but according to their ability, counsel and substantial aid ?

In a word then, and with this general observation, we may dismiss the topic—as within the circle of a family every office of kindness, every mutual duty of humanity, is enforced by special motives and obligations ; so within a church—the members of which, like the members of a family, are connected by a peculiar sacred relation of intimacy, endearment, and reciprocal influence—every duty which men owe to each other as men, or christians as christians, has a peculiar force and sacredness. And as the man who, under whatever pretense, neglects the duties which he owes to his own family, has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel ; so the professed christian who under any pretense neglects the duties which he owes to his own church, individually or collectively, has reason—to say the least—has serious reason to inquire whether he is in simplicity and godly sincerity walking worthy of his high vocation.

We see then how sure will be the peace, purity, happiness and growth of that church in which all the duties of the brotherhood are faithfully performed. That church will be peaceful. No root of bitterness can be planted there to spring up with corrupting and destroying fruits. That church will be pure. There

“Error hath no place  
That creeping pestilence is driven away,  
The breath of heaven hath chased it:”—

There every offense is speedily removed; or the offender, found irreclaimable, is promptly excluded. That church will be happy. How blest the tie that binds in sweet communion the hearts of the disciples in such a brotherhood.

No passion touches a discordant string,  
But all is harmony and love.”

That church will grow and be enlarged. Its light will shine out upon beholders with an overpowering yet attractive radiance; heavenly influences will distil on all its assemblies like the rain and the refreshing dews; the Lord will command his blessing upon it, even life for evermore; and he will add to it daily such as shall be saved.

## CHAPTER V.

### *Discipline in a Church.*

"Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven. 1 Cor. v. 6, 7.

THE subject next to be considered, is discipline in a church, or the dealings which are to be had with offending members.

I. Our first question is, What are the ends to be gained by the exercise of discipline in a church?

1. One leading object is the reformation of offenders. The most careless view of the nature and design of church communion, shows that measures ought to be taken with an offending member to secure his repentance and recovery. If the rule of Moses, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him," is a law of brotherhood between man and man, how peculiarly binding must it be on those who are mutually connected by the bond of a covenant to walk together as followers of him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. "Brethren," says an apostle, "if a man be overtaken with a fault, ye who are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." "Brethren," says another apostle, "if any of you do err from the truth,

and one convert him, let him know that he who converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

2. The improvement and edification of the church, is another object to be secured by the exercise of discipline. Nothing is more at war with the objects for which churches were instituted, than the influence of members whose conduct belies their christian profession. A backsliding, erring, sinning member is not merely dead in respect to the good which he ought to be doing to his brethren, provoking them to love and good works,—his influence is positively pernicious; if suffered to remain, it brings down the standard of piety in the church to a lower and still lower mark. "Know ye not," said Paul in reference to this very point, addressing the church at Corinth—"Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be a new lump."

3. Another object is the vindication of the honor of religion. By the institution of churches, christianity is made to assume a visible form before men. It is not a system of doctrines merely, and divine precepts propounded to the abstract consideration of those who hear of it; it is a system embraced and professed by a distinct body of men, and in popular estimation identified with the character of those who unite in

professing it. When men see a church full of the spirit of Christ, then they are constrained, in their consciences at least, to glorify God. When they see a church deformed with members whose life is a libel on the gospel, they are willing to believe that libel true, they encourage themselves in despising religion, and harden their hearts against its claims.

These are briefly the leading reasons why it is necessary that there be in every church the vigorous exercise of christian discipline on every occasion.

II. Our next question is, What offenses ought to be made the subjects of discipline.

Undoubtedly there may be too much use of church censures, and the very object for which they were instituted may be thus defeated. There have been churches formed on the principle that nothing should be done which was not done unanimously ; the veto of a single individual was enough to defeat any measure. As one error always leads to another, this error lead to the still greater error of taking up a course of discipline against any member who on any occasion differed in judgment from the majority. Now what could the censures of such a church be worth ? It is plain then that not every difference of opinion, no, nor every error in practice, ought to be taken up in the church as a grave offense. "Him that is weak in the faith, re-



ceive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." Much may be done to instruct and elevate an imperfect christian, much may be done to remove his errors and correct his faults, which never ought to be reckoned under the head of discipline.

What then is the general rule which ought to guide us on this subject? I answer, First, nothing which if persisted in, would not be a proper ground of exclusion from the church, ought to be made the basis of any disciplinary proceedings. Secondly, no offense is a proper ground for exclusion from the church, unless it is one which if persisted in, implies a dereliction of the christian character. This last remark is sufficiently verified by referring to that leading principle, You have no right to exclude from church communion any whom Christ acknowledges as his redeemed.

In the scriptures we find such particulars as the following, mentioned as offenses calling for decided church censure.

1. Scandalous vices and immoralities. "I have written to you," says Paul, (1. Cor. v. 11.) "if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one no not to eat."

2. The denial of the essential truths of christianity. "Though we, or an angel from heaven,

preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal. i. 8.) "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." (2 John 10.) There can be no reasonable doubt that these passages, and others like them, require all the churches to disown those who disown the gospel. What are the essential truths of christianity, is a question too large to be discussed here. I will only say, that while it is obvious that a man may through ignorance or prejudice embrace some erroneous interpretations of the word of God, or derive from it some erroneous inferences, yet be a sincere disciple of Christ,—it is equally plain that a man professing himself a disciple, may entertain doctrines which remove him farther from the school of Christ, than if he had professed himself a Mohammedan.

3. Making parties and disturbances in the church. "A man that is an heretic," says Paul, "after the first and second admonition, reject." (Tit. iii. 10.) "A man that is an heretic," means simply a man who creates divisions—a man of a factious and contentious spirit. A man governed by such a spirit betrays a radical deficiency. He is not to be recognized as a christian.

4. Suffering one's dependent relatives to

want and to come upon public charity, when able to relieve them. Paul speaking to Timothy respecting the relief to be afforded by the churches to the helpless widows among them, says, "But if any widow have children or grandchildren let them first learn to show piety at home," and adds, "If any provide not for his own and specially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel." (1 Tim. v. 4, 8.) Such an offender surely ought not to be retained in the church.

5. Living without employment,—an indolent and useless life—was regarded by the apostles as an offense calling for the exercise of discipline. "We command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." This disorderly walking is explained in the context, to mean living without any active or useful employment. (2 Thess. iii. 6—11.)

6. Living in irreconcilable enmity with any of the brethren, as it is a sufficient proof of a desperate destitution of the christian spirit, is also a proper subject of the most decided censure on the part of the church. But upon this particular, we shall have occasion to touch again, in the sequel.

III. What is the process and method in which the discipline of the church is to be administered?

In discussing this question, I shall suppose that you as a church-member have asked it for your own practical instruction.

1. You are not to begin by telling your story in a church meeting. If you have heard or seen any thing against a brother, you are not to bring it before the church at all, till you have it in a suitable form and state for the action of the church.

2. Nor are you in the first instance, to go with your complaints to the pastor or other elders of the church. The pastor is as it were the presiding judge, and the church is the jury, by whom it may be necessary that this case should be regularly tried; and common sense shows you the impropriety of trying to employ the judge as prosecutor.\* If you are at a loss

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\* It has been suggested to the writer, that the comparison above, is liable to misapprehension. Doubtless it may be easily misunderstood, if the reader neglects to notice the object for which it is introduced. I would by no means intimate that the *powers* of a pastor in relation to the trial of offenders, are at all analagous to those of a judge in a court of law; or that the church are only to act the part of jurors, receiving implicitly the decisions of the bench, respecting the principles applicable to the case in hand. It is indeed the *duty* of the pastor, in a case of discipline, to show, according to his ability, what rules of scripture, and what principles of common sense are applicable, and to do this impartially. It is his duty, in such matters, as in every thing else, to go before the church, as their guide and teacher; but he is to guide them by instruction and conviction, not imperatively. It is the duty

how to act in a particular emergency, you may properly apply to a pastor or other officer of the church, or to any judicious and experienced brother, for advice,—and you ought to do so—but you need not in such a case bring your complaint against the individual, with whom you have to do. How easy is it to state your difficulty, and propose your inquiry, without mentioning any name whatever.

3. Nor are you to go round from one brother to another with your fears, and your anxieties, and your intimations about the supposed offender. That is the way in which mischief is sometimes done on a wide scale ; and if you attempt to act in that manner, you ought to meet a prompt rebuke from every one whom you address.

What then is the proper method of proceeding ? I answer by referring you to the well known rule laid down by Christ, in Matthew xviii ; 15—17. “ If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone : if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every

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of the church to follow him, so far as they have reason to believe that he is right ; and no farther. Perhaps the office of judge-advocate in a military court, would afford a better illustration of these duties of a pastor, than can be found any where else.

word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." This text prescribes the method which ought to be adopted in all cases of personal injury, and in all ordinary cases of more general or public offense.

In regard to cases of personal injury, the language of the text is clearly imperative. "If thy brother shall trespass *against thee*, go and tell him his fault." First then, let us consider the rule in reference to such a case.

1. The first thing to be done in the treatment of such a case, is private expostulation with the offender. "Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." This you are to do, in just this way, in regard to every offense which deserves to be noticed at all. It is a too common practice with church-members, when they disagree, to neglect this simple measure—the dictate of common sense and christian feeling, no less than of the Savior—till the difficulty has been fermenting and brewing a long time; till each has shown the other, in many ways, how much he dislikes and distrusts him; and perhaps till their mutual alienation has become a matter of general notoriety, not only in the church, but among all their worldly neighbors and acquaintance. Then when the difficulty

has grown old and stubborn, one of the parties begins what he calls a course of discipline with the other, and goes to him, not with the design or hope of effecting a reconciliation at once, but only to tell him with a bitter mind all his grievances, and to get the matter in a way to be prosecuted before the church. I say then, remember this distinctly, If thy brother trespass against thee, *go* at once, like a brother, and in the spirit of a brother, to win him back to the exercise of kind feelings toward yourself. Tell him just what it is which has wounded you; hear his explanation; make every concession which you would make if you and he were in dying circumstances; be resolved that by your kindness, and gentleness, and meekness, you will heap coals of fire on his head, to melt but not to consume, to purify but not to destroy. If the offense is too small to be treated so formally, it is too small to be mentioned to a third person; nay it is too small to be remembered to his disadvantage. Do this then, if you do anything. Do this, and perhaps thou wilt gain thy brother.

2. The next step, if the former fails, is expostulation with the assistance of one or two brethren. "If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more." It was a principle of Jewish law, that no man should be condemned but by the concurrent testimony of two

or three witnesses. "On the word of two witnesses, or on the word of three witnesses, shall the matter rest." Deut. xix ; 15. This seems to have been a proverb among the Jews in the time of our Savior. Christ quotes it accordingly in one of his public discourses, where he says, "My judgment is true ; for I am not alone, but I and the father that sent me. It is written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true." (John viii ; 16, 17.) So in this instance he quotes it—the very words of the law—in a popular and proverbial sense. Take with you one or two more, that your expostulation with the offender may be confirmed by their concurrence and authority ; and that, if you should be constrained to carry the matter farther, your complaint may be sustained by them, as well as by yourself. Here is a second trial of the man's spirit, a second opportunity for a reconciliation. Though the former effort failed, there is hope that this may be successful. When you came alone, perhaps he heard you with some prejudice against you, perhaps your manner was not sufficiently conciliating, perhaps your words were not fitly chosen. But now you have selected one or two of the brethren whom you consider most likely to have a favorable influence over him ; and in their company you go to him, determined not to give him up, and earnestly bent on effecting a reconcili-



ation. These brethren act as mediators between you and him, and as moderators of your debates. They hear his explanations, if he offers any; they hear his defense, if he defends himself. They show you perhaps some error on your part; they lead you perhaps to new concessions. They ply him with new arguments, or set the former arguments in a new light. Perhaps he yields; if so, how blessed is the victory. Peace is restored. Thou hast gained thy brother.

3. If he is still unyielding, there remains another effort. "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church." In bringing the matter before the church, still use the advice and assistance of those brethren who have already assisted you. Let that which is alledged against the offending brother be distinctly defined. Show, in your complaint, (which ought of course to be in writing,) what specific offenses the accused has committed against you, so that he may know, and the church may know, what it is which you are to prove, and against which he must defend himself. Let your complaint be put into the hands of the elders, that they may advise you of any mistake which you may have committed, or of any thing which you may have left undone. And if, even at this stage, a reconciliation can be effected, by their mediation, or in any other way, so much the better;

the great point is secured ; thou hast gained thy brother. But if the necessity remains, let it come before the church ; and let the church use their united endeavors to heal the difficulty. Perhaps the offender may now be won over to a new spirit. Let the trial be made. Let him be admonished and pleaded with by the assembled brotherhood, speaking through their elders. Try it diligently and thoroughly. Perhaps he may be gained.

4. But if all is in vain, then comes the last resort. " If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." He is no longer to be reckoned among the faithful. He has shown that he has not the spirit of Christ, and is none of his ; and what remains but that he be regarded and treated accordingly. The church is to exclude him from its fellowship.

This is the method of proceeding in cases of personal injury. The same principles obviously apply, in all ordinary cases of more general and public offense. You have seen in a brother something scandalous. He has done you no personal wrong ; but he has fallen into some course of conduct, or has committed some individual act, which dishonors the gospel, and is glaringly inconsistent with his christian profession. How obviously is it your duty in such a case, not to publish the offense, not to make

it a matter of debate and discussion with others, not to avoid the offender as a person infected, but first of all to go with the kindness of a brother, and tell him of his fault in a private fraternal conversation. If you bring him to repentance, and to such acknowledgment of his sin as shall seem to be required by the nature of the case, which is indeed the first fruits of repentance, you have nothing more to do. If he shows no signs of repentance, if he denies the fact alledged, or admitting the fact, denies its criminality ; or admitting both, manifests no contrition or change of mind ; you are to take with you one or two more, and with their aid and counsel, to renew the effort. Then, when you have done your utmost to reclaim him, but in vain, bring the matter, as in the other case, to the knowledge of the church ; and it is for the church to take the same course as before.

Cases sometimes occur, of such a nature, and attended by such circumstances, that the church, as a body, is constrained to take cognizance of them at once. Yet in these cases, which are by no means so frequent as some suppose them to be, the process of discipline ought generally to be conducted through the successive stages described by Christ, in the passage above quoted. Private admonition and exhortation, first by some single member of the church deputed for the purpose, on account of his special fitness ;

then, if that fails, by one or two more, deputed in like manner ; and if the offender is still unyielding, the admonition of the church ; ought to precede the act of expulsion. Each of these trials affords a new opportunity of securing that great end, the repentance of the erring brother.

In all *ordinary* cases, I say, the several stages of this process ought to be performed, before the excision of the offender. Yet it cannot well be questioned that some peculiar cases admit of peculiar proceedings. How, think you, was the incestuous man excluded from the church in Corinth after the receipt of Paul's first epistle ? Was he retained, with all that thick and loathsome infamy upon him, while one expostulation after another was tried in vain, and the result patiently waited for ? Ought he to have been so retained ? The crime being so horrible, and the fact so notorious, what could be done for the vindication of the dishonored gospel, what for the reformation of the offender ; but to cut him off at once, as one with whom there could be no communion, no not for an hour ; and then to deal with him ; and on his giving, to the church and to the world, fit demonstrations of repentance, to restore him in the spirit of meekness ? When similar cases occur in these days, I would justify a summary process by this apostolic example. To delay and linger for form's sake, where the offense is

marked by preeminent guilt and flagrancy ; to retain such an offender in communion while private exhortation can be twice repeated with a proper interval, and while public admonition can be employed, and time afforded for its results to be manifested,—nay to permit him to come forward, at any stage of such a process, and wipe all away by any form of confession,—such a course, instead of being likely to inspire him with horror and remorse at the enormity of his crime, seems likely rather to make him feel that there is nothing so very enormous and shocking in the case, and thus to harden his heart and make him forever a reprobate. Instead of promptly vindicating the outraged honor of religion, it seems likely rather to encourage the contempt of infidels and the ribaldry of the profane. In the cases now referred to, it belongs to the offender to *prove* that his penitence is true and thorough, before he can become again a *credible* professor of faith in Christ ; and that proof can be found only in the exhibition of the proper fruits of repentance.

IV. What is excommunication ? What does the excision of an offending member include ?

1. It does not affect the final salvation of the excommunicated person, or the possibility of his becoming the subject of pardoning and renewing grace. No man's salvation depends on his continuing in the communion of any particular

church. If he is excommunicated without cause, he is as likely to be saved as before. If he is excommunicated for a sufficient reason, he would have been lost had he continued in the bosom of the church. If he shall finally be rejected from the society and blessedness of heaven, it will not be because he was previously excommunicated from the church on earth, but only because of his intrinsic unfitness to be a companion of the saints. When he comes to the bar of the final judge, the question will not be, What was his standing in the church?—but, Has he made his peace with God through the blood of the great atonement? The book to be opened will not be the book of church records; but the Lamb's book of life.

2. Excommunication implies no imprecation, no prayer of malediction. A Roman Catholic sentence of excommunication, or such a sentence in the forms of the Greek church, is little else than a tissue of curses. But as we understand the nature of a church and the ends of church discipline, the excision of an offender from such a society, is far from involving any thing like the imprecation of misery upon his soul or his body.

But it may be asked, What is that "delivering such an one to Satan," which is spoken of by Paul, in reference to the case of the offender at Corinth? I answer, if it means, as most commentators seem to suppose, that the excision of

that man from the church was to be followed by some divine infliction of bodily pain in testimony of the authority of the apostle, then that case was so far peculiar, and constitutes no example for churches, whose sentence of excision has no such consequences. And let this phraseology mean what it may, one thing is very clear, there is nothing of the spirit of malediction about it; if the guilty person is "delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh," it is to the end "that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

3. Excommunication then, is, on the part of the church, simply the solemn declaration of a fact which diligent and patient inquiry is supposed to have ascertained beyond all reasonable dispute. The sentence is a public declaration, that in the judgment of the church this man is not one of Christ's disciples; that he gives evidence of a heart fatally alienated from the God of grace; that therefore they are under no obligation and have no right any longer to acknowledge him as a brother in the Lord, or to hold communion with him as a fellow disciple and a fellow heir of the grace of life. The effect of that declaration is, that all his visible relations to the kingdom of God on earth are at an end. The church has protested against him; and he ceases to be an accredited representative of the gospel. The act of the church does not make him a repro-

bate ; it only declares that they have found him one, and that they are constrained to treat him accordingly.

Such is a rapid survey of the dealings which are to be had with offending members in a church. I have endeavored to place the subject in the light of plain scripture and plain common sense. Need we say now how far that church has departed from the order and purity of the gospel in which the discipline of offenders is fallen into disuse ? Need any thing be said to illustrate the importance of this discipline, its indispensable importance to all the ends of fellowship, improvement, and extended influence, for which churches were instituted ? Is there any need of warning you to see to it, that this great means of grace is not neglected, in the church with which you are in covenant ?

What spirit is that which would denounce a church for the exercise of discipline ? That such a spirit is sometimes manifested in certain quarters—that the expulsion of an offender from a church is sometimes condemned as an infringement on his civil rights—who is ignorant ? That such a spirit is the spirit of intolerance and persecution, what candid mind can hesitate to believe ?

Is there any thing more inseparable from religious freedom, or more worthy to be numbered among the inalienable rights of man, than the



liberty of associating for religious and devotional purposes? What is more natural, what more reasonable, than that those who thus associate should be allowed to say whom they will admit to their communion, and whom they will disown and reject? Take away from the churches this liberty; let any civil power come into the churches, and claim the right of judging for them who may be expelled as unworthy and who shall be retained; and it will be time to charter another MAY-FLOWER,\* and bear away for some new inhospitable shore, where we may again set up the altars of our God beyond the reach of tyranny.

But it is sometimes said, Freedom of opinion is sacred, and if you excommunicate me for my supposed errors of faith, you violate my freedom of opinion. Not at all,—we answer. You have liberty to think as you please; and have not we liberty to think as we please? You have the liberty of thinking that your Unitarianism or Universalism is the christianity of the Bible, if you can, and the liberty of saying so; and shall we be denied the liberty of thinking our thoughts about the matter, and saying what we think. Is this liberty of opinion all on one side; or does it belong alike to all parties? Have not we as good a right to think and to declare that

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\* The name of the vessel which brought the Pilgrims to Plymouth in 1620.

the Universalist is not a christian, as he has to think and declare that christianity consists in the doctrine that there is no future retribution?

But it is said, that to expel a man from the church on account of his opinions, is to injure him by stigmatizing his character. I answer, Ecclesiastical censures, when applied on slight occasions, hurt no man; and when applied on great occasions, they wrong no man. No man would be hurt by being expelled from a Presbyterian or Congregational church, for the opinion that sin is the voluntary act of an intelligent agent; the sufferer in such a case would be the excommunicating church, not the excommunicated individual. No man could be wronged by a simple exclusion from the Roman Catholic church for not believing the doctrine of transubstantiation, or for maintaining that the worship of the mass is idolatry; in such a case the common sense of the public would decide at once, that there ought to be, and could be, no religious communion between the parties. To expel a man for opinions which he does not hold, would be indeed injustice; but if a man is really a Universalist, what harm will it be to him if the church declares the fact, and declares that therefore it can no longer recognize him as a fellow disciple? Is his character impaired in the estimation of the public? What is it which makes men distrust him? The fact that the church

has ejected him for his theological opinions? or the fact that he is a Universalist? It is the man's known opinions which impair his character in such a case,—not the doings of the church in reference to those opinions.

It cannot easily be doubted, that the men who make the most outcry against this exercise of church discipline, understand well enough, the absurdity of their own clamor. No absurdity can be greater than such complaints and threats, unless it be the absurdity of a church that would permit them to influence its proceedings. The public—not the christian public, but the irreligious world, infidels and all, know perfectly, how irreconcilable is the difference between the common faith of the evangelical churches on the one hand, and the grosser forms of heresy on the other. And the public conscience will always justify all such acts of reasonable discipline.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *Responsibility of Church-Members as professors of Religion.*

"Among whom ye shine as lights in the world." *Philippians ii. 15*

No man can be regarded as being strictly and truly a professor of religion, so long as he refuses to associate himself with some visible community of christians. It is the association of christians in churches, which, in effect, draws the dividing line between that party on the one hand, who are considered as undertaking and engaging to be the followers of Christ, and that party on the other hand who are considered as undertaking no such thing.

This makes it proper for us, while we are examining the relations and duties of church-members, to give a particular and distinct attention to their peculiar responsibility as professors of religion.

I. Wherein does this responsibility of church members consist ?

I answer *first*, It does not consist in their having any great duties to perform which are not the common duties of all men. It is their duty to love God, and to spend their lives in the service of the Redeemer ; and so it is the duty of every other man. It is their duty to pray, to

pray often and fervently ; and so it is the duty of every man. It is their duty to walk humbly with God, making his word their guide, and diligently observing all his institutions ; and whose duty is it not ? It is their duty to be always active and enterprising in efforts to do good, and especially in efforts to save souls ; and is there any man who is not bound to do likewise ? It is their duty to separate themselves from the wickedness of an ungodly world, and to avoid every appearance of evil ; and is this duty peculiar to them ? or is it a duty which no man can neglect but at the peril of his soul ? It is their duty to commemorate the death of Christ according to his institution ; and is not this the duty of every soul for whom Christ died, and to whom his dying love has been declared ? It is their duty solemnly to dedicate their children to the Lord, and faithfully to train them in his covenant ; and is not this too the duty of every parent, as really as it is theirs ? All the details of duty are included in the great commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength ;" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself ;"—and both these commandments in all the particulars of their application, are as binding on every man, as they are on him who has professed to follow Christ.

In what then does the peculiar responsibility of a professed christian consist ? I answer *sec-*

*only*, It consists generally in this fact, that in consequence of his relations to the cause of religion and to his fellow men as a professor of the gospel, his actions have an increased importance. The conduct of a professed christian, right and wrong, is more important than the same conduct could be, if he made no such profession. On this point I offer two illustrations.

1. His conduct is more generally observed, and more carefully scrutinized by those who witness it. Place any man where all his conduct is seen and carefully attended to, and there is of course a greater importance attached to all his actions than could belong to the same actions if he were placed in circumstances of entire obscurity. Every man who makes a profession of religion, places himself in such a situation. On him the eyes of men are fixed; to see how he conducts himself. He has avowed the determination to live soberly, righteously, and godly; and many are watching him to see how that avowed determination is carried into execution. Men of the world are looking at him; his fellow christians are watching over him; all his offenses are marked, all his indiscretions noticed; no act or word of his is sure to pass without some comment silent or expressed. This alone, if there were nothing else to be considered—the mere fact that every thing which he does or says is peculiarly liable to no-

tice, attaches to all his conduct a special importance, and thus connects with it a special responsibility.

2. The conduct of a professed christian has more influence. Whatever gives influence to a man's example, makes his actions more important and increases his responsibility. The example of a rich man is more thought of, and more likely to be followed, than the example of the same man would be if he were poor; and in this respect he has more to account for. So the example of magistrates and men to whom power is entrusted, and the example of men who are endowed with superior intelligence, is more important because more influential; and the conduct of such men is therefore attended with a greater responsibility. And is there nothing in the relations of a professor of religion which gives his conduct a more serious influence than the same conduct could have if he made no religious profession? By his profession he has become, as it were, a living representative of the gospel of Christ. Most men judge of religion, to a very great extent, by what they see of it in the conduct of its professors. To him therefore, among others, they look to see what religion is; and his habitual conduct, nay all that he does, has an influence on their opinions and their conscience, if not directly on their course of action. If they see him living like a stran-

ger and pilgrim in this world ; if they see that it is his aim to serve God by promoting the best interests of his fellow men ; if they see him walking as Christ walked ; there is a voice in every action of his, which reproves them for their unbelief and tells them how pure and blessed and powerful is that gospel which he has embraced and which they are neglecting. But if on the other hand they see him living as they live, bearing no decided practical testimony against their worldliness, their unholy ambition, their love of pleasure, their neglect of God ; they lay their consciences asleep ; they persuade themselves that there is no great difference between religion and irreligion, and therefore no great need of their attending to the matter at all. In like manner, though not perhaps to the same extent, does his conduct affect his fellow christians. He and they are mutually connected, in an important relation arising from their common profession. When minds are thus connected, there is of necessity a mutual influence, an influence tending to bring all to the same level of feeling and of practice. One warm-hearted, consistent, active christian does much to infuse into all his brethren the same spirit by which he is animated. And one cold, worldly, dead professor of religion, may be an affliction and a curse to the whole church with which he is connected, he may grieve and dishearten those



who would strive for better things ; and not only so, but he may spread all around him, the coldness of spiritual death.

On professors of religion, then, rests this eminent responsibility, What they do, the spirit which they manifest in their lives, the example which they give, is regarded by other men as an illustration of the nature, power, and value of religion. To them is committed in a great measure, the power of deciding what shall be the popular notion of christian holiness. To them is entrusted the visible dignity and glory of the gospel. Each of them individually sustains his own part of this immense responsibility.

II. What are some of the particulars in which professed christians most frequently fail to honor the gospel ?

In answering this question, I am not obliged to speak particularly of the dishonor done to religion by apostacy, or by open vice. It may perhaps be otherwise elsewhere ; but here, in our churches, the instances are few,—compared with the whole number of church-members, the instances are very few,—in which a professed disciple is convicted of dishonesty, or uncleanness, or drunkenness, or any offense against what is commonly called good morals. And when such instances occur, instances involving a decided abandonment of christian character ; there is a ready though imperfect remedy, the offender can

be cut off and disowned. It may be publicly declared that he has proved himself a deceiver, that neither the church nor the gospel is accountable for his conduct; and thus, though the stigma of his crime remains for a long time, inseparable from religion in the calumnies of the profane, a loud and solemn testimony is lifted up against it. Every such fall is dreadful in its influence on the ungodly; but it is not in this way that professors of religion most frequently fail to honor their profession, nor is it of these things that I am here to speak. I am to point out rather, some of those common deficiencies on the part of professed christians, which are not considered as involving a forfeiture of christian character, which church-censures do not reach and cannot remedy, but which are seriously inconsistent with the responsibility of those who are depended on to "shine as lights in the world."

1. The members of churches frequently dishonor religion, by their ignorance in respect to religious things. A professor of religion, especially one who is not uninformed on other subjects, ought to be able to correct the misapprehensions of worldly men, to refute the calumnious representations and objections of opposers, and on all proper occasions to give a reason, i. e. a rational and convincing account, of the hope that is in him. This is expected. But

how often is the expectation defeated. How often is a professor of religion who has been such for many years, almost as ignorant of the system of divine truth, and of the grounds and reasons of that which he professes to believe, as the convert of yesterday. A member of a church is naturally expected to be acquainted with the nature, object, relations, and principles of the association to which he belongs. But how often are church-members found ignorant of any rational ground of preference for one form of church organization over another, or for any form of church organization at all—ready to be subverted by any dogmatic assertion of ignorant or prejudiced men—ready to give up Christ's institutions, or even the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free, if somebody shall, only confidently enough, tell them that they are mistaken. It is naturally expected of professors of religion, that they shall not be ignorant respecting the state and progress of religion in the world, the interests and vicissitudes of the kingdom of God, and the things which christians can do, and ought to do, to fill the earth with the knowledge and praise of the Savior. But how often are they found miserably uninformed about these things, easily imposed upon by adversaries, ready to give credence to every lying messenger of Satan, that shall undertake to dissuade them from any effort of as-

sociated christian benevolence. All this, lamentable as it is, would be quite excusable were there no means of information. But in these days, and in this community, how inexcusable is such ignorance in any man who has common sense, and common intelligence on other subjects ; and how dishonorable is it to religion that such ignorance should be betrayed by its professors.

Let me charge you then, especially, my youthful brethren in the church of God, not to dishonor religion in this way. Take pains—use diligence to be well instructed in every thing that relates to the gospel. You may not be able to study the original languages of the scriptures ; but you may read your English Bible till you are familiar with every book and chapter, with every appeal and argument. You may not be able to see for yourself, what learned men have said in Latin and German, by way of learned commentary on the word of God ; but you have plain expositions of the scripture in your mother tongue, which will help you to a happy knowledge of its spirit, its connections, and its force. You may not be able to enter with the acuteness of a skillful theologian into all the nice discussions of the day ; but you may take some plain and popular compend of divinity, and read it with your bible in your hand, till you understand the system of divine truth,

and are able to prove what you believe out of the living oracles. You may not be learned in all the lore of early ecclesiastical history,—nor is that needful for you; but you may easily learn the constitution and usages of the churches around you, and how far these are sustained by scriptural example, and by the principles of common sense. And if you know enough to read a newspaper intelligently, then you may easily make yourself acquainted with the progress of religion every where, and with the merits and conduct of every benevolent enterprise.

2. Religion sometimes suffers dishonor by the neglect of its professors to employ their good sense and discretion in their efforts to promote the cause of Christ. Numerous are the injunctions of scripture which insist on the exercise of cool discretion in every attempt to rebuke iniquity or to promote holiness. What means that passage in the Proverbs where in one verse we are told, “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him,”—and in the next verse we read, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit?” What can it mean but this, that in undertaking to rebuke a wicked man or to hold any debate with him, you must use a careful prudence. What else can be the meaning of that maxim in the sermon on the mount, “Give

not that which is holy unto the dogs ; neither cast ye your pearls before swine ?” What means that direction given by Christ to his apostles, “ Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves ?” Did he not intend that they should employ all the deliberation and foresight of which they were masters, in the work of spreading the gospel ? What can be plainer in itself than that you are to put in requisition all your good sense and your soundest discretion, whenever you undertake to do good ? Yet sometimes do we not see men who in relation to other things show judgment, forethought, and a sense of the connection between means and results, divorcing themselves, as it were, from their judgment and common sense, when the ways and means of promoting Christ’s kingdom, are in question, and acting as if zeal were the only possible qualification for usefulness ?

3. Religion is most frequently dishonored by a neglect of what are deemed the more minute applications of christian principle. Gross violations of the moral law are comparatively rare ; but these lesser inconsistencies with the spirit of a christian profession are numerous, and often distressing.

The tendency of christian principles in the heart, is to make a man generous in his spirit, and honorable in all his conduct. No man who has attained to an eminent degree of the spirit

of the gospel, can be mean-spirited or niggardly ; the faith which fixes his mind on objects of heavenly contemplation, and expands his heart with the noblest affections, makes it impossible. Could such a man as Paul do a mean thing ? So it ought to be with every professor of religion ; he ought to apply the elevated principles of his profession to all the details of his business ; every action of his life ought to be controlled by the spirit of a heavenly mind. And if he indulges himself in any thing contrary to this, he does violence to the better principle within him, and hinders lamentably his own improvement in holiness. How carefully then ought every one who would be a christian, to keep himself at a great remove from every thing low, or narrow, or of questionable propriety, in his worldly transactions, and from all that looks like grasping and hard dealing, or like going very near the edge of dishonesty. Is not religion too often dishonored by the want of this minute conscientiousness in its zealous professors ?

And here, as I am addressing these considerations particularly to the young, let me say that religion in an apprentice, or journeyman, ought to make him far more faithful than others, to his master or employer ; and that an apprentice who neglects his master's business, for any reason whatever but a physical inability to attend to it, or the hired workman who acts, in

the least, the part of an eye-servant, does that which is inconsistent with his christian profession, and thus dishonorable to the gospel. Your time for amusement, your time for reading, your time for devotion, should be taken not at all from your master, but from that portion of time which you are allowed to consider as your own. If you are working for another, or for yourself, when your master has a right to suppose that you are working for him, you are guilty of dishonesty. And whether that work be twelve hours or twelve minutes, the dishonesty is the same in kind; there is no difference but in degree.

The legitimate tendency of religion in another particular, is to that gentleness and suavity of manners, and that kindness of speech, which is the most appropriate garb of true christian meekness and gentleness of temper. But how often do we see professed christians exhibiting in their language and deportment, a self-willed overbearing temper, which irritates and repels all who come in contact with it, and the indulgence of which, resists, grieves, quenches the spirit of Christ within them. As a professor of religion, you ought to cultivate diligently, a kind and affectionate temper. Is your natural temper, stern, morose, forbidding? Labor to overcome it, and to honor religion by making your-



self an example of its meekness, gentleness, and universal kindness.

The tendency of religion, in another respect, is to great simplicity as to style and manner of living. The worldly spirit loves display. The rich man loves to display his wealth; visit his dwelling, and see how much is intended for display. He who values himself for his learning, or his wit, or his imagination, loves to have his valued qualities seen; and hence his pedantry, his forwardness, or his affectation. She who thinks highly of her beauty, loves to have that beauty seen, and hence her extravagant adornings of her person, and her sometimes unfortunate, because too manifest, attempts to make herself, "the observed of all observers." The spirit of religion in the heart, opposes all this. Thus religion where it has full and free scope, is the best refiner of the taste; for the purest simplicity is the truest elegance. Sometimes we see this happily illustrated, when a gay and fashionable lady becomes a serious and intelligent believer. What a change, outwardly as well as inwardly. Gone are the extravagant adornings of gold and pearls and costly array; and even the irreligious of refined taste, marvel at the more attractive simplicity of her attire, not knowing how it comes to pass. The change is perfectly natural; and takes place, perhaps, without any distinct design or consciousness on

her part. Change a peacock into a ring-dove ; and you will of course change the flaunting gorgeous feathers of the one, into the delicate plumage of the other. The outward revolution, when a gay female is converted, is generally in proportion to the change within, and results from that new simplicity of taste, which is inspired by christian simplicity of heart. Such simplicity of taste, stamped on a church-member's whole style of living, honors religion. But a dashing, self-displaying, finery-loving professor, disgraces christianity.

The tendency of christian piety is to a cheerful tranquillity and peace of mind. No man in the world can be so happy, as that man can be, and ought to be, who truly walks with God, and has his affections on things above. This, seen and known, as it must be seen and known where it really exists, honors the gospel. But a gloomy melancholy believer, one who is always in the dark, makes men afraid of religion ; and indeed if he is a fair example of its power, they are not without some reason to be afraid of it. The active christian ; he who diligently applies the great principles, and the all-inspiring motives of christianity, to his general course of living and to all its details ; he who gives himself wholly to the cause of the Redeemer, so that he can truly say that for him to live is Christ ; will be a happy christian. But he whose reli-

gion consists chiefly in speculation and sensibility ; and who thinks much and inquires much about his frames and experiences, instead of addicting himself in simplicity and earnestness to the active service of his Lord, will generally be one of your melancholy and unhappy professors, if not one that in some other way, and some worse way, dishonors the holy name by which he has been called.

4. Professed christians often dishonor religion by the want of a holy and fervent zeal in the things of the kingdom of God. Nothing is more inconsistent with the spirit of christianity, than that indifference to the salvation of men, that cold insensibility to the thrilling rousing motives of the word of God, that conformity to the world in its maxims and fashions, of which we all see so many examples. And how much all this dishonors religion before men, checks its progress, and keeps back its universal triumph, let every man judge in his own conscience.

III. We have seen wherein consists the peculiar responsibility of a religious profession ; and wherein professed christians most frequently come short of their special obligations. We may now inquire what helps and advantages the professed christian has, to aid him in sustaining this responsibility ? In answering this question I mention,

1. Those means of grace which are common

to all. You who sustain this great responsibility, have the word of God, teaching you to choose your way and guide your footsteps by the light of eternity, and bringing to your heart a world of warming and inspiring motives. You have the sabbath, ever returning with its hallowed influences, and telling you of rest and purity in heaven. You have the privileges of God's house, the preaching of the gospel, the moving solemnities of social worship. You have free access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ, and may call down upon your soul the influences of the Eternal Spirit. These means of grace, God has given to train men,—all men who do not resist them and thus make them void—for heaven. It is by these means of grace, first of all and chiefly, that you must grow in holiness, and be fitted to discharge effectively, your serious and special responsibilities. But these common means of grace are not the only help which, as a professed christian, you enjoy ; for,

2. The fact of your peculiar responsibility, or rather the knowledge of that fact, is a peculiar advantage. To know that your conduct is watched and closely scrutinized ; more especially, to know that every act of yours assumes a new importance, in consequence of your special relations to the church and to the cause of Christ ; to know that your example, in its influ-

ence, if it be good, is more blessed, or if it be evil, is more malignant, than that of other men ; to know that you stand where, if you do not testify loudly and clearly for the glory of Christ and of his gospel, you will shamefully dishonor both ; all this tends with a powerful influence to make you more watchful over yourself, more on your guard against temptations, more fervent in your supplications for the promised Spirit, more diligent to profit by the means of grace, and more actively devoted to the service of Christ.

3. The sympathy and watchfulness of your brethren, affords you another peculiar advantage. All those who are associated with you in this profession, have covenanted to watch over you, to reprove you when you stray ; and you and they are mutually bound by the ties of common affection and common interest. You and they constitute a separate and peculiar community, pervaded by one spirit. You are associated with them for the very purpose of mutual security and improvement. One chief end of the association is that you may all grow in grace, and may provoke one another to love and good works. Is this now no advantage in respect to your peculiar responsibilities ? Place a christian where he can have no communion with believers, where all with whom he can associate are entirely worldly and selfish, and will he not be in most peculiar danger ? Every thing

around him conspires to smother and quench the fire of devotion in his spirit. Every thing cooperates with the corrupt tendencies of his nature, to make him forget the things that are not seen, to make him selfish and earthly in his affections, and to prevent him from seeking that intercourse with God by which alone he lives. But place him among christians, let him be known as one of them, let him share with them in their common interests and enterprises, let him feel that they are watching over him in love, and that in like manner he is bound to watch over them; and will there not be between him and them, a mutual influence to promote each other's spiritual interests? In that sympathy which always operates when kindred minds are thus brought into contact, will there not be a mutual influence to cheer and quicken? Will not this sympathy be likely to raise the tone of christian feeling? Will it not aid in bringing up to a high point, the standard of christian zeal and effort? The blessed experience of thousands testifies.

4. The special duties and acts of church-membership, afford you important assistance. I refer now to all those acts which you are called to perform as a member of the church, all those solemnities in which you take your part by virtue of your relation to the visible kingdom of Christ. The act of making a public profession of faith

in the Redeemer, and of entering into an explicit covenant with God and his people, may be considered as one of these duties. And what impression such an act is fitted to produce on the mind of the actor, what assistance it is likely to yield him in subduing his worldly affections;—need I describe? When he solemnly declares that he has chosen Jesus Christ as his Savior and his hope, and that it is his deliberate and settled purpose to devote his life and being to the praise of God; is there not much in such a vow, will there not be much in the remembrance of it, to impress his mind with the grandeur of his relations to the world not seen, much to make him feel that he is dead to earth and sense and self, and that his life is hid with Christ in God? And afterwards, when he joins in receiving others to the same covenant, is there not something in that act, not only to remind him of his vows, but also to impress upon him most effectively his great responsibility? Perhaps he is a parent. If so, is it no special advantage to him in the discharge of his parental duties, that he may bring his children to the altar of God, and there, by the touching simplicity of a hallowed ceremony, dedicate them to his Savior? And whatever may be the relations which he sustains, whatever the sphere in which he acts as a professor of the gospel, if he is indeed desirous to live up to the mark of his responsi-

bility, and keep his heart warmed always with devotion to Christ, will he not find himself kindled to new fervor of affection, and raised to new energy of holy purpose, so often as he eats of that bread, and drinks of that cup, which show the Lord's death, bearing his thoughts backward to the darkness, the tears, the terrors of that night in which the Savior was betrayed, to the untold, unfathomed anguish of Gethsemane, to the dying agony of Calvary.

Is it not a *privilege*, then, to be a professed disciple of Christ? Is it not an honorable privilege to bear his name, and to stand among men a living representative of the power and beauty of his gospel? Is it not a privilege to be thus the salt of the earth, the light of the world, placed like a city on a hill, which cannot be hid? What though you feel on every side your weakness, and are ready to tremble at this great responsibility; have you not access to fountains of eternal strength, and are you not surrounded by aids and incitements of inestimable value? It is a privilege to be enrolled and acknowledged among the followers of Jesus our Lord.

But, remember, this privilege is of no advantage save to those who value it aright, and are resolved to make the most of it. No privilege of any kind can be a real privilege except to such as choose to avail themselves of it. Of what value is the increased responsibility of a religious



profession to him who is not bent on discharging it? What is this extended influence, what are these better opportunities of doing good, to him who does not choose to use them? What can they be to him, but a curse? And what are all these special means of grace to him who is not bent, with an earnest and inflexible resolve, on making constant progress towards the kingdom of his Father? To that professor of the gospel who does not care to let his light shine before men, who forgets or disregards the responsibility of his profession, who does not aim and toil to overcome the world, who does not struggle to subdue his earthly and selfish passions, and who therefore leaves these special means of grace to operate of themselves upon a heart immersed in worldliness—to him what is the privilege of his profession? It were better for that man that a millstone were cast about his neck, and that he were cast into the depths of the sea.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *Relation of Churches to each other.*

"But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it towards all the brethren which are in all Macedonia." 1 Thess. iv; 9, 10.

THE subject to which your attention is now invited, is *the relation of churches to each other*.

When a few learned and devoted men in England, not far from the beginning of the seventeenth century, began to revive and publish the principles of congregationalism, they were called Independents, and their churches were denominated Independent Churches. And doubtless they adopted some opinions and practices which made the appellation not inappropriate. Their successors in England are known by the same name at this day; and the condition of their churches at the present time, might be cited to illustrate some of the undesirable tendencies of those particular opinions and practices which give the title its strict significancy. But our fathers in New England, our Cottons and Hookers and Davenports, in their writings and in the acts of synods, solemnly disavowed both the name of independency and the thing, as it was then understood, and as it is still understood.

most commonly. While they insisted that every particular society or stated congregation of disciples is a complete church, within itself, and is dependent for its existence, its privileges, its ordinances, its offices, its discipline, on no other church or combination of churches, and on no authority other than that of scripture and reason ; it was still with them a leading principle that churches, and especially, neighboring churches, are connected with each other by relations involving great and mutual duties, and are therefore bound to maintain a fraternal correspondence and union. They therefore disclaimed a title which they had never chosen ; and preferred that their churches should be called CONGREGATIONAL,—an appellation which sufficiently distinguishes them from all diocesan and presbyterial organizations, and yet does not confound them with the close and self-secluded churches to which the other title more properly belongs.

I say then that the constitution of the New England churches is as truly distinct from absolute independency on the one hand, as it is from presbyterianism and episcopacy on the other. The great principle of the communion of churches—or as the fathers expressed it, the consociation of churches—is a vital principle of congregationalism, and is practiced upon continually, while yet the liberties of each church are as perfect as if no such principle existed.

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Let me ask your candid attention then, while we proceed to inquire, What are the duties which one church owes, or may owe, to other churches.

I. In answering this question, the first place should be given to the duty of mutual recognition and respect. Your church—whatever may be your opinion of its elevated standing—is bound to recognize its sister churches, as having the same rights, honors, and privileges with itself, and as being, equally with itself, the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have good reason to be assured that this or that religious community is not a church of Christ, then you may say so, and treat it accordingly. But so long as you are not prepared to deny it the name of a christian church, you are bound to treat it with corresponding respect and confidence. You are bound to regard its individual members as members of the body of Christ, and to receive any of them to your own communion accordingly, without demanding further evidence of his fitness, unless some specific disqualification is alledged and proved against him. And if that church excommunicates one of its members, you are bound to presume that it has done right, and to regard the excommunicated as a heathen man and a publican, till you have some overruling and irresistible evidence to the contrary. You are to permit any mem-

ber of that church, when his convenience requires it, to sit down with you at the Lord's table ; and when Providence gives you the opportunity, you are to commune with them in the breaking of bread. The officers of that church, you are to treat with the affection and respect due to officers in the house of God ; and you are to be willing that the usefulness of its pastor, and of your own, should be increased, and the unity and fellowship of the churches be promoted, by the occasional interchange of pulpit labors, and by their stated association with each other, and with other ministers of the word, for mutual happiness and improvement.

That the apostolic churches, without compromising their individuality or their separate rights, did acknowledge each other with christian respect and affection, such as I have described, cannot easily be doubted. How else could the brotherly love of the church at Thessalonica be extended towards all the brethren in all Macedonia. Yet Paul strongly commends them for this ; and his commendation thus shows that there must have been a communion and intercourse among all the churches of Macedonia. By Peter's first epistle, the church with which he was then residing sent the token of its christian recognition, to the churches whom he was addressing : "The church which is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you." (1

Pet. v. 13.) When Paul would recommend Phebe to the confidence of the christians at Rome, he described her as "a servant of the church at Cenchrea," and on that consideration enjoins it upon them to "receive her as becometh saints, and to assist her in whatsoever business she had need of them." (Rom. xv. 1, 2.)

II. The duty of rendering to sister churches in circumstances of embarrassment or distress, all proper sympathy and assistance, deserves to be distinctly noticed. Of this point, the New-Testament affords a striking illustration. The church at Jerusalem had extraordinary expenses to sustain, in times of peculiar embarrassment. There were the apostles, and that was the center of their missionary operations. There were multitudes of poor, dependent on charity for the supply of their daily wants. And besides this, all Judea was suffering under special calamities. In these circumstances—as if all the churches every where had but one common interest in the case—contributions came up to Jerusalem from Antioch, from Galatia, from Macedonia and Achaia, and from we know not how many other quarters. What was done on that occasion, shows how sister churches ought to care for each other, and how ready every church should be to help another in any embarrassment and distress.

Certainly none will imagine that this duty of

churches to each other, is less important in these times, and especially in this country, than it was in the days of the apostles. How many churches, in the most evangelical districts of the land, need temporary or permanent assistance from such as are able to afford it. A new congregation is to be gathered in a growing city, and a few brethren, forming themselves into a church, begin the work. Shall they have no word of cheering, no substantial aid from the churches already well established and prosperous? The christian inhabitants of some rising village, or some neglected suburb, awake to effort, organize a church, and undertake to build a house of worship, and to maintain the stated administration of the gospel. Shall not the neighboring churches bid them God speed, and put forth a helping hand to advance their enterprise? A thousand churches in the new and growing regions of the country, need that timely relief which shall free them from embarrassment, and enable them to bear a noble part in filling the land with light and spiritual life. Shall any church refuse to answer their call, addressed to all the feelings of consanguinity and patriotism, as well as to the nobler sentiment of christian brotherhood?

Here I may say, for the sake of guarding against a possible misconstruction, that the church has no jurisdiction over the property of its mem-

bers. If a member refuses to bear his part in the common expenses of the church, if he does nothing at all in the way of benevolent action, if he shows himself manifestly and entirely addicted to covetousness which is idolatry, he may doubtless be dealt with as an offender ; but still it is true that the church has no jurisdiction over property. It can levy no taxes for charitable or other purposes. It has indeed its treasury, in the charge of proper officers ; but that treasury can be supplied only by voluntary contributions. Nor can the church dictate to any man how much he shall contribute, or to what specific object, or through what channel. In respect to all these things, each member is responsible to his own master, and his right of private judgment is complete. Nor may the church claim any exclusive right to be his almoner or even to convey his contribution to the object which he has chosen. The province of the church in regard to such matters, is to instruct, and persuade, and excite ; to see that the spirit of benevolent action, the spirit of self-denial, of zeal, of love to the universal brotherhood of Christ's disciples, is awakened and sustained in all its members. This, and whatever appropriate measures are necessary to this, is all that the church, acting as a church, can properly attempt, in relation to the charitable contributions of its members.



III. It is one of the mutual duties of churches, to give and receive advice, in cases of peculiar importance, or of common interest. When the church at Antioch was agitated with controversy, it sought the advice of the church at Jerusalem, which was adorned at that time, with the presence of nearly all the apostles. If any authority could be required to justify, or to enforce, so simple a thing as the mutual consultation of churches, in matters of peculiar difficulty, or of common interest; this would be sufficient.

I proceed now to enumerate some of the most common cases, in which this duty of mutual consultation is deemed binding.

1. The ordination of a pastor, or his solemn induction into office, is one of these occasions. This is a matter, not only of great importance to the church immediately concerned, but a matter of deep interest to other churches. The establishment of an able and devoted pastor, not only blesses the church where he is placed, but strengthens the churches round about, and makes the ways of Zion rejoice. So the induction of an incompetent and unfaithful person, into the pastoral office, any where, is an affliction to all the neighboring churches, and to the common interests of the kingdom of Christ. It is on this principle that a church, after having elected its pastor, is ordinarily bound to call on the neighboring churches, to come together by

their pastors and messengers, that they may advise and assist in his solemn inauguration. It is on the same principle, that the council thus convened looks into the preliminary proceedings, to be informed respecting the regularity and harmony of the election, and the terms on which the office has been offered by the church, and accepted by the candidate. It is on the same principle, that the council proceeds to examine the person set before them as the pastor elect, that they may be satisfied respecting his knowledge, his soundness in the faith, his ability for the work, and his piety. It is on the same principle that they pass, and put on record, their solemn judgment respecting his fitness for the office to which the church has called him, and if they find him fit, set him apart to the responsibilities and labors of that office, by prayer and the laying on of hands. All this is not because a church has not a right to choose its own officers, or even in particular cases, to induct them into office ; but because a church is bound, by the law of christian love, to ask the advice and aid of sister churches, in matters of great and common interest.

2. So in regard to the dismissal of a pastor from his official relation to the church ; a pastor has a right to resign his office, and the church has the power to accept his resignation, and the parties *may* declare the relation dissolved, and

it is dissolved, without any consultation of the neighboring churches at all ; nor do we call in question the power of the church to do all this, when we say that it ought to have called in other churches to advise and aid in such a transaction. The thing may be done, and done effectually, and nothing be wanting to its validity, when yet it is not done properly, or with decorum. A thing may be done which is not done decently and in order. And a decent respect for the feelings and interests of sister churches, a moderate share of the spirit of christian courtesy, will constrain any church of moderate intelligence, to do such a thing decently and in order, by calling a council of the sister churches, when the preliminaries have been arranged, and saying to them, Thus we have done, and thus we propose to do ; and now we ask your judgment and approval.

And even in the stronger case, in which a pastor is charged with some gross delinquency, whether it be heresy in doctrine, or immorality in conduct, I know not certainly that the church has not the abstract power to try him, to remove him from his office if he be guilty, and to exclude him, as they would any other offender, from their fellowship. But I do know certainly that though this might be a way of doing the thing, it would not be the best way. It would not be the prudent way, for what could be more

likely to rend the church into fragments than such a procedure? It would not be the impartial way; for who can tell how great might be the influence of personal attachments or personal animosities over the decision? Probably it would not be the effectual way; for how easily might a pastor thus expelled, secure the continued confidence of some at least among the neighboring pastors, and, through them, of not a few among the churches; and thus retain the rights of church-membership, and the privilege of appearing before the public as an accredited preacher of the gospel. And, what is at least of equal consequence, it would not be the way marked out by the great principle of the communion of the churches. The churches generally have an interest, nay a right, in the character of this man as a minister of the gospel. The principle of confidence and affection towards them, requires that in such a case you ask their advice and their judgment. The verdict of a respectable council will be, to all parties, far more conclusive than the verdict of a single church, and that church so deeply interested. If he is acquitted, the churches will receive him. If he is condemned, it will not be easy, without strong proof of some injustice done him, to make a party in his favor.

3. There is another case in which consultation with sister churches becomes a duty; and that is when controversy arises, which cannot

easily be adjusted ; or when some peculiar difficulty occurs, in the administration of discipline.

Sometimes a church finds itself divided in opinion on some important subject, and neither party is willing to submit to the judgment of the other. The controversy perhaps is of long standing, and much unkind and bitter feeling has been excited. Often in such a case, if the neighboring churches are invited to come and counsel them, the controversy has been adjusted by their assiduous and earnest labors. It is the testimony, we may say, of a wide experience, that the advice of a council, selected with tolerable discretion, is the best means of securing the adjustment and oblivion of such difficulties.

So in the administration of discipline, cases sometimes occur of such a character, so intricate and involved, so difficult of investigation, or on other accounts so likely to divide the church, that, though as yet no parties are formed in respect to it, assistance seems to be needed. And what aid in such a case is more desirable than the aid of neighboring churches, present in council, to hear and to advise ? The person accused may have some objection to the fitness of the church to judge in his particular case, and may desire the investigation to proceed under the inspection of others, whose minds are more cool and unbiassed. If he has any such distrust of his own church, certainly impartial advisers can be

found among the sister churches. Let him make his request, then, kindly and respectfully; and, though the church of course must judge as to its reasonableness, such a request, unless it be obviously unreasonable, will not often be refused.

4. There is yet another class of occasions on which churches are bound to consult together; namely, when a person censured by the church to which he belongs, considers himself unjustly censured, and believing that he can justify himself, desires that the proceedings may be reviewed.

It is not true, as is often supposed, that the man who is wrongfully excommunicated by a congregational church, and who can make the wrong which he has suffered manifest, has no remedy. He has a remedy, all the remedy which the nature of church fellowship admits or requires. He cannot indeed appeal to a superior court; and there obtain a direct and authoritative reversal of the decision. He cannot call in the aid of any higher power, which by its mandate, shall compel the church that has disowned him, to receive him into fellowship again. But he can do what is much better. He can state to the church, respectfully, and in the spirit of meekness, yet as decidedly as the particular occasion may seem to require, that he thinks they have erred, and wherein; and he

can request them to unite with him in seeking the advice of sister churches. It is not often that such a request, if made with christian courtesy, and sustained by any reasons, can meet a denial. Indeed if the church believes its own decision to be right, and plainly right; and if at the same time it finds that the person censured is bent on justifying himself, and is likely to produce in any quarter an impression favorable to himself and unfavorable to those who have censured him; what can it desire more than the opportunity of laying the whole case before the sister churches, so that if any error has been committed, their advice may correct it, and if all is right their approbation may sanction it, and may silence the voice of protestation and complaint.

Nor, if the church refuses his request, is he even then without a remedy. He has still the privilege of carrying his own case to sister churches, and asking them to give it an examination. In other words, after first giving the church due notice of his design, he can communicate, by letter, to as many of the neighboring churches as he may choose, the fact that he considers himself aggrieved, and the fact that the opposing party has refused to unite with him in seeking advice; and he can ask them to meet in council, and upon an examination of his case to give him such advice and aid, as may

to them seem proper. Such a council comes, like any other council, to inquire into the facts, to mediate between the parties, to effect, if possible, a reconciliation on the spot, and if that cannot be attained, to pronounce an opinion in relation to the proceeding as right or wrong,—an opinion to which all whom it concerns, the church, the party aggrieved, the sister churches, will of course yield such deference as, in view of all the circumstances, it may seem to deserve.

But what are the powers of a council? I answer, A council, whether called by the church only, or by the mutual consent of the church and the aggrieved individual, or by the latter acting alone, has no power whatever but to examine, and to give its opinion and advice. It can exercise no control. Its office is to give light, not to pronounce decrees. Representing the sister churches, and speaking in their name, it is naturally listened to with great affection and deference. If it finds, after examining the facts, and hearing the parties, that the church have fallen into some mistake; it points out the error, and advises them to correct it and to receive the brother to their fellowship again. If it finds, on the other hand, that the church is in the right, and that the conduct of the person censured has indeed been such as to call for censure; it gives its opinion accordingly, and earnestly strives with the offending brother to convince him of his sin,



and to bring him to such acknowledgments, and such humiliation of himself, as will assure the church of his repentance. This is all the power of a council, the power of giving advice, and declaring an opinion. Do you ask, Were it not better that the council in such cases should have some other power, some judicial authority? I answer, No. Power has no relation to church-censures. The grievance complained of by the party who deems himself wronged, is a church-censure;—and what is a church-censure? He complains that the church, proceeding on insufficient grounds, have formed and declared an opinion unfavorable to his christian character, and have thus withdrawn from him their brotherly confidence and affection. Has power any relation to the correction of such a wrong? Can the opinion of that church be changed by a decree of court? Can any imperative “order sent down” from some lofty “judicatory,” compel them to restore to that man their confidence and love?

What then, you ask perhaps, is the remedy, in case the church refuse to comply with the advice of council, and to restore to fellowship the person whom they have wrongfully rejected? I say the remedy is this,—that while there still lies against that man the obstinately unfavorable opinion of the church with which he has been connected, he has on the other hand in his

favor the opinion of a council of neighboring churches, chosen on account of their fitness for the very purpose of inquiring into the case ; and whenever the members of the council, or any of them, are known, and known to be respectable, the verdict of that council will weigh more as testimony in his favor, than the sentence of that single and probably prejudiced church can weigh against him. What better remedy can there be, in the nature of things ? He is not indeed forced back into false fellowship with a church whose hearts reject him ; but he is acknowledged as a fellow disciple by the sister churches, and he can with propriety be received as a member by any of them. . . Meantime it is for these sister churches to decide for themselves, whether the fault of the erring church, which thus perseveres in its error, is such as to destroy its title to farther confidence and communion.\*

If it be asked what is the warrant for ecclesiastical councils in the cases referred to ; it is enough to say, that they are the most natural and obvious application of the principle that churches, though independent of each other for their existence, and subject to no superior pow-

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\* It is proper to add here, that instances in which the advice of a council is rejected by a church, are, as might be expected, exceedingly rare ; and occur for the most part, in those cases which involve some principle extensively questioned.

er but that of truth and the God of truth, are yet bound together by ties of communion and intercourse and common interest.

IV. Churches are bound to co-operate, as they have opportunity, in promoting the general interests of religion, and especially in promoting each other's purity, zeal and efficiency.

Such a proposition certainly needs no argument to sustain it. It is enough to show how churches can co-operate for these ends. They can maintain a fraternal correspondence by letter, stimulating each others faith and zeal. They can send committees or messengers to each other, when circumstances are such that it will not seem obtrusive, to propose plans of christian action, and to inquire concerning each others visible prosperity and spiritual welfare. And—what is a far more efficient and important mode of co-operation—they can meet together at fit seasons, not only for united worship and mutual exhortation, but for consultation, inquiry, and mutual instruction. In such meetings, each can report to the others its own state ; its prosperity, if it be prosperous ; its trials, if it be in circumstances of adversity ; its declensions, if it have to acknowledge a departure from its former love. Each can stimulate the others, and its own members too, by exhibiting its efforts for the religious training of the young, for the improvement of the converted, and for the conver-

sion of the worldly ; and the amount and mode of its various contributions for objects of christian benevolence. In such meetings too, subjects of common interest can be discussed, and light can be elicited by the comparison of views from different quarters, and by bringing together the results of a varied experience. The best methods of promoting the spirit of piety, and of resisting the many forms of vice and error that are abroad, can be inquired after. The case of such churches as are feeble and ready to faint, being presented, a strong and effective interest can be secured in their behalf. And in ways too numerous to be mentioned, the combined and augmented influence of the churches thus associated, may be brought to bear on the advancement of the cause of Christ.

I need not say that such meetings have been tried. In one form or another, and under different names, they are well known to nearly all the evangelical churches in the land. The Presbyterian churches, in their presbyteries and synods ; the Episcopal churches, in their diocesan conventions ; the Baptist churches in their associations ;—have their stated meetings by their pastors and delegates, in which the general interests of religion are consulted, and by which they stir each other up to love and good works. I say nothing here in behalf of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction and power which some of these assem-

blies attempt to exercise, and about the usefulness and lawfulness of which there is great diversity of opinion among christians ; but none can doubt that as means of stated communion and efficient co-operation among churches, such meetings have a real value. In like manner, nearly all the congregational churches meet together steadily, for co-operation and mutual consultation. These meetings are called, in some places, associations, and as stated ecclesiastical councils are permitted, when regularly invited, to inquire and advise respecting difficulties, disorders, and cases of discipline. In other parts of the country, similar meetings are held at stated seasons, under the name of conferences of the churches, and are not improperly debarred from acting as ecclesiastical councils, in any circumstances. Under one of these names or the other, nearly all our congregational churches are formally connected together ; and it may be said that where the churches have no such means of stated intercourse, not only by their pastors, but by delegates from among the brethren, there they must necessarily fail, to a greater or less extent, in respect to their duties to each other and to themselves.

The principle that churches are closely connected with each other by their common constitution, and common interests and objects, is obviously a principle of great importance. How

obvious then is the criminality of every thing which counteracts this great principle, or is inconsistent with that cordial feeling of brotherhood, that warm-hearted fellowship and co-operation so essential to the well being of the churches. Do you ever indulge yourself in unnecessary and unkind comparisons between your own church and sister churches around you? Are you ever heard to speak disrespectfully of the pastor of a neighboring church, who, less gifted perhaps than some others, or endowed with talents less imposing, is yet pious and diligent in his work? Is your church, through your influence, or with your consent, pursuing an exclusive, separating course of conduct, standing aloof from all delegated meetings of churches for communion and concert and augmented efficiency of action? In all such things as these you are plainly swerving from your duty, and falling short of the claims which the Lord Jesus urges on you as one of his disciples. Such things are at war with the spirit and the principles of that brotherly love, on which, as it was manifested in the Thessalonian church towards all the brethren in all Macedonia, Paul bestows his special commendations. Your church, in separating itself from the sister churches, and in refusing to throw into their delegated meetings for mutual incitement and the common benefit, the whole of its influence,—shows how much it has need that

some apostle should "write unto it as touching brotherly love;" for it seems to be not yet effectually "taught of God" in respect to that great principle of his kingdom, the principle that all are one. Especially if your church is one endowed with many gifts, and capable of doing much in such meetings, to instruct and stimulate the sister churches, and to lead them on in works of faith and love, and to sustain them under their trials and fears, how unquestionably is it hiding its light, by that assumed independence, that unblest spirit of separation. "We beseech you," is the word of the apostles, coming with emphasis to all such churches,—“we beseech you brethren that ye increase more and more” in this neglected duty of brotherly love.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *Responsibility of the New England Churches.*

"From you sounded out the word of the Lord." 1 Thess. i. 8.

**"YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD : A CITY THAT IS SET ON A HILL CANNOT BE HID."**

These words the Savior used in describing the common responsibility of all those who have received from God through his Son the blessings of the gospel. To them it belongs—whether they are considered individually, or as collected and associated in churches—to them it belongs to illuminate the world. The same truth which has made them free can free the nations from the bondage of sin and hell. The same hopes that fill their minds and warm their hearts, may be communicated from one to another till all the world shall feel the blessed inspiration. The same affections and purposes which make them the children of God, and which constitute their resemblance to his holiness, may be awakened up in other minds, and may spread from heart to heart till all mankind shall own one Father, and adore one Savior. All this may be done ; but whether it shall be done, and when, depends under God, on those to whom the gospel has already come with its renewing and sanctifying influences. To them—one and all—God says,



Freely ye have received, freely give ;—let your light shine—it has been kindled for this very purpose—let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

But it is not my design here, to enlarge on the common responsibilities of the church of God. Different portions of the visible kingdom of Christ have different advantages and opportunities for promoting the interests of that kingdom. All who have received the gospel—nay all who have embraced it in love, and have experienced its power, have not received the knowledge of the truth with the same clearness, comprehensiveness, or correctness, and are therefore not all equally prepared to hold forth the word of life before the world. All who are associated as the followers of Christ in visible churches, are not associated under forms of organization equally scriptural, or equally adapted to the ends for which churches were instituted. Nor have all the same or equal external facilities for the exertion of a wide and mighty influence. Such diversities as these, constitute the diverse responsibility of different portions of the kingdom of Christ. A church in some secluded spot far up among the mountains, with little intelligence among the members, with little knowledge of what is going on in the great world, with little intercourse between the spot which it inhab-

its and the centers of wealth and knowledge and power, with a pastor whose knowledge of divine truth is narrow and confused, and whose opportunities for personal improvement are limited, and with a Sabbath School which can hardly be maintained for the want of books and teachers—even such a church is placed there as a light, and is bound to let its light shine. But what a difference in respect to responsibility, between that church and another of higher privileges. So in one part of the world—in some wide region—in some whole nation, perhaps—the churches can only be expected to maintain a desperate struggle for existence, and to keep their ground under calamity and oppression ; while in some other land the churches have it in their power to hold forth the word of life before a gazing nation, and even to make their sound go out—like the voice of the preaching and praising firmament—into all the world.

My design, then, will be sufficiently understood when I say, that I propose to illustrate the special responsibility of the churches of New England. I wish to show in what peculiar position these churches stand, and what peculiar advantages they enjoy in respect to the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth. The subject, you see at once, is one which a volume could not exhaust, and which therefore can be only imperfectly and rapidly surveyed within these limits.

Our first remark, then, respecting the responsibility of our churches, is,—they are eminently free—peculiarly exempt from all external restraints upon their activity and usefulness. That is, there is nothing to hinder them from exerting their powers and capabilities to the uttermost. The way is open for them to do all the good they can.

In most other countries, christians and churches find themselves shut up and hemmed in on every side, by the jurisdiction of the government over religion and all religious institutions. They find that they can undertake no benevolent enterprize—they cannot set up a college or a theological seminary—they cannot print a tract—they cannot carry on a Sabbath School—they cannot give away a Bible perhaps—without leave first had from an arbitrary and jealous government. But with us the right of every man to use his time, his personal exertions, and his property, as he pleases, for the promotion and diffusion of his own religious principles, for the conversion of his neighbors and of the whole world to his own faith; and the right of every man to associate with others for the prosecution of a common religious or philanthropic enterprize—are reckoned as among the inalienable rights of human nature; and the least infringement on those rights is a declaration of war against the very basis of the social compact.

But our churches—the primitive and Puritan churches of New England—have another advantage, which though less vital is of the same sort with the one just described, and is essential to its full enjoyment. Their liberty of doing good, guarded as it is against legal and governmental encroachment, is at the same time unrestrained by ecclesiastical jurisdiction or authority. There are forms and constitutions of what is called church government, under which churches, yes and individuals, are so carefully guarded against error that they are almost equally guarded against truth, and are so strictly restrained from doing wrong that they have little liberty left of doing right. But with us there are neither canons nor constitutions to prevent improvement and enterprize in active christianity, or to resist the reformation of prescriptive errors. In our churches, whatever effort seems to promise good, whatever measure experience or common sense shows to be well fitted to promote the conversion of sinners in the congregation, or the revival and increase of piety in the brotherhood—whatever method of operation is effectual to stay the progress of destructive evils, or promote the spread of knowledge and holiness—may be undertaken at once, without asking leave of presbytery or prelate, and without waiting for the tardy approbation of conference or convention. The way is open for every

one of all these churches to do all the good it can. If they fail to exert their utmost power for the advancement of the world's salvation, it cannot be said to excuse them, that they were hindered by the interference of civil power, or by the usurpations and the *vis inertiae* of ecclesiastical legislation.

Our second remark is, The organization of these churches is such as to call into useful employment every gift of every member. It will not be thought wrong to advert here to the fact that, under some forms of organization, it is for the ordained ministry alone to teach, to exhort, to counsel, to bear any part in the administration of discipline, or to lead their fellow christians in any devotional exercises. Under such a system, what is required on the part of church-members is not intelligence, not wisdom to debate and advise in matters of common interest, not the power to stir up the minds of others to zeal and diligence in the work of God, not the gift of leading the thoughts and desires of others in becoming words to the throne of grace, but instead of all these, a passive obsequiousness to ecclesiastical rulers. Thus a man may be endowed with every gift, yet if he sustain no office, what are his gifts all worth—they must lie dormant. There are other forms of government which do not carry the separation between officers and laity in the church to such an extreme, but

which are still encumbered with the same disadvantage in a less degree. There are churches in which a talent for exhortation or for leading in prayer, is readily enough called into exercise, but a talent for counsel, a cool judgment, skill in the adjustment of difficulties, and activity and accuracy in the details of business, are of no use, save as the possessor happens to be invested with some official character. In a church, for example, which puts all its affairs into the hands of a pastor and three or four elders, what is the need of intelligence and wisdom, or of deliberate and independent thought, or of any thing but obedience on the part of the brethren. But in the churches of which we now speak, as all affairs are left in the hands of the brotherhood, so every member of the brotherhood is sure to have calls enough for the exercise of whatever gifts he possesses. Nay so much depends on the diligence, the faithfulness, and the wisdom of the brethren, so obvious is the necessity for an intelligent and efficient laity, that nothing can tend, more effectually than this constant demand, to secure a constant supply of the requisite activity and knowledge. As the result, it may be stated without boasting, that so numerous a body of churches, better instructed in respect to the great doctrines of the christian faith, or better prepared and trained for active usefulness in the kingdom of God, cannot

be found in all the world.\* Thus these churches are all, save here and there a case of lamentable delinquency, so many schools for the cultivation and employment of all those gifts by which believers can benefit each other, or promote the kingdom of God. Thus the churches of New England may naturally be expected to embody, always, a great amount of disciplined and practiced moral power—power which may be wielded to vast effect for the universal advancement of the cause of holiness.

Thirdly, the power and of course the responsibility of these churches is augmented by their mutual communion and intercourse.† While they acknowledge no common authority over them, other than the authority of common sense and of the word of God; they are not, as is sometimes thought, so many independent and isolated bodies, with no bond of union, and no perception of common interests and duties. This has been shown already. All the acts of the communion of churches, are mutually rendered at least as truly and faithfully, as in any other community of churches whatever. They are really and truly united—one spirit circulates through the whole communion—the prosperity of one portion is felt by all—the zeal of one tends to awaken every other—opinion, thought, feeling, pass from one to another with no obstruction.

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\* Note D.      † Note E.

What facilities does this afford for the exertion of a combined and resistless moral influence. What responsibility does it throw upon these churches.

Fourthly, these churches are blessed with a ministry, evangelical, enlightened, and united. A few indeed of the churches built by our fathers, on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone, have departed from the faith and have ceased to be numbered among the churches. We speak not of them but of the thousand that remain, and that acknowledge each other as the depositaries of the precious faith which has made New England what it is ; and we say that these churches are blessed with a ministry eminently evangelical. Hardly a pulpit can be found, in which the great doctrines of the gospel are not exhibited with a clearness and consistency not often known in other countries. Among the thousand congregational pastors of New England, how rarely can one be found, who preaches either an antinomian or an Arminian gospel—who either covers up the obligations of the sinner, or obscures and hides the sovereignty of the Creator,—who either extenuates man's guilt and administers opiates to his slumbering conscience, by denying his ability as an agent, or neglects to teach him his dependence on the Lord Jesus alone, for righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. How rarely can



one be found, to whose ministry God does not set the seal of his approbation, in the conversion and sanctification of souls.

At the same time, the pastors of these churches, to a greater extent than can be affirmed of any equal body of churches in the world, are enlightened and well instructed. While we are tied up by no rules which forbid the calling of any man to the pastoral office, whom God has endowed with such gifts and graces as give good promise of success, yet, such is the force of public opinion, so favorable are the arrangements of God's providence, that hardly any are set to feed the flock of God, whose minds are not cultivated and disciplined by general study, and none at all who have not given serious attention, to gain a thorough, comprehensive and consistent knowledge of the system of truth contained in the Bible. Theology is more studied, and from the beginning has been more studied, in New England than any where else in the world. The result is that the divines of New England, the Edwardses, and Bellamys, and Dwights of former days, not to mention the names of others who adorn and enlighten the present generation, are at this hour giving lessons in the knowledge of the word of God to the churches of all protestant christendom.

There is a reason for this. The very constitution of these churches is such that they can-

not live without an enlightened and able ministry. If other churches have their imposing liturgies and magnificent ceremonies, their towering hierarchies, their sacerdotal garments, their ministers whose mysterious functions open and shut the kingdom of heaven ; it is not so with these. If other churches have their strong systems of ecclesiastical government, putting every thing into the hands of a combined and associated clergy, and making the power of that clergy so strong that the people cannot resist it without convulsive revolution ; it is not so with these. In these churches the minister has no power but the power which grows out of the confidence of the people in his personal character, and the power of the truth which he preaches ; and therefore if he is to be any thing, he must be not only a man of unimpeachable integrity and purity, but a man of intelligence, and especially of intelligence on the subject of theology. Such, to a happy extent, are the pastors of these churches.

Nor is this all ; the ministers of the New England churches are, and with few exceptions always have been, eminently harmonious in their views, and united in action. Freedom of thought they have always held to be their privilege as men, and their duty as teachers of religion ; and of course they have always entertained some diversity of views, respecting various explana-

tions and defenses of the principles of their common faith. Often there has been controversy among them ; and sometimes controversy has waxed warm, and in its style and spirit has shown that good men are compassed about with infirmity. Yet as there has been no ecclesiastical power to stimulate the zeal of factions, and no mitred dignity to waken clerical ambition ; so, however individuals may have been affected, these debates have generated no distinct and permanent parties which could not give each other the right hand of christian fellowship, none which could not render to each other all the offices of christian brotherhood, none which could not labor side by side in love, none which could not stand shoulder to shoulder in the onset against error and sin.

With such a ministry to teach them, and to lead them on in works of christian zeal, what may not these churches accomplish, if pastors and people will remember their responsibility, and be faithful to their trust.

Fifthly ; the responsibility of these churches will appear in a strong light, if we consider the relations in which they stand as *the churches of New England*, and the advantages which such a location and connection gives them.

They are *the churches of New England*. Other churches there are on the same soil, accepted of God and honored of men. But

these churches are more in number than all the others put together ; they have greater resources than all the others ; they are coeval with the country ;\* their history is the history of all that makes the heart of a New Englander beat high with emotion ; all the peculiar institutions of New England were planted simultaneously with them, have grown up and flourished with them, and are inseparably intertwined with them, from the root to the topmost branches. Other churches there are, which do not dishonor their name ; but to these churches, not less than to all the others, do men look as the keepers and guardians of the truth, as the protectors of morality, as the supporters of all good institutions, and as the great security for whatever is worth keeping in the venerable puritan character of New England.

What then is New England, and what is its position in respect to this country and in respect to the world ? First, it is a region, the population of which, compactly settled, distinguished by general intelligence, industry, sobriety and enterprise, and trained for successive generations in a reverence for the Bible, and for the institutions of the christian religion, presents the fairest field for a more complete and glorious triumph of the gospel over an entire people, than has ever yet been witnessed. Next, New Eng-

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\* Note F.

land is even yet the great nursery of the nation ; —from these green hills and quiet vales, from these busy cities and resounding shores, proceeds that stream of emigration which is spreading life, civilization, wealth and power over the whole continent. Next, it is the chief fountain of intelligence and thought for the whole nation. Where is it that every citizen can read and write ? Where are the great places of resort for education, from every State and district in the Union ? Whither do schools and infant institutions of learning, all over the land, look for teachers ? Where and by whom, are one half of the books read by the American people, manufactured ? Who are the professional men of every part of the country, and where were they trained for their employments and their influence ? Again, New England is the great source of moral influence for the nation. Who are they that form churches on the frontiers, and are foremost among the settlers of the wilderness in building houses of worship, and setting up Sabbath Schools, and securing the ordinances of religion ? Whence flow the streams of the water of salvation that make the desolate places rejoice ? Yet once more, In New England are the main resources of almost every institution and enterprise in the country, which aims at the renovation of the world. Who are they that go forth with adventurous feet into every clime,

publishing the word of God? Who are they that toil among the heathen, or endure bonds and imprisonment for the gospel of Christ and the liberties of man, or have lain down prematurely in the graves of martyrs far away from their fathers' sepulchers? How many of them all are the sons of New England? Where are the resources, whence the contributions, by which such efforts are sustained? How soon would every enterprize which looks beyond the limits of our own country faint and languish if New England were blotted out, or if these churches should utterly abandon their duty?

Sixthly, The character of the age affords these churches incalculable advantages and facilities for the accomplishment of great results. The times are times of change and revolution every where. In this country the generation now coming upon the stage is to decide in a great measure the destinies of all posterity. The world itself seems agitated, tremulous, half dissolved, and ready to take, under whatever influences may be applied, some new shape and impress. If the churches in these days come up to the help of their Lord, if they come up to the mark of their high responsibilities, how soon may be accomplished the vision of new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. And have not the churches of New England much to do in such times as these?

Seventhly, These churches have always been eminently blessed by the outpouring of the Spirit of God. From the earliest days, with the exception of a period of comparative twilight between the first generation and the age of Whitefield and Edwards, the New England churches have enjoyed a large measure of that divine influence by which sinners are renewed. Read what is written of Hooker and his compeers, how they preached; what effects attended their discourses,—and judge whether their age knew nothing of those special outpourings of God's converting grace, which we call revivals of religion. After their removal from the stage, a period of declension followed; but from the era of 1740, New England has been the scene of an almost uninterrupted series of revivals in one place and another, which have given a continually increasing life, purity, and vigor to the churches, and an increasing power to the ministration of the word; so that now the spiritual blessings poured down in this form on these churches, are spoken of, as we may say, throughout the world. And not only so, but wherever New England Christians are gathered into a church, wherever New England preachers labor in word and doctrine, there generally the same blessed phenomena are visible,—there God by special effusions of his Holy Spirit, shows that he is with his people of a truth. Now where such

blessings are bestowed, do they bring with them no peculiar responsibility? Ought not the churches thus signalized by the presence of their God, to let their light shine? Ought they not to go on from strength to strength, till the entire population within their sphere shall be a truly christian population? Ought they not to send out far and wide such an influence as shall accelerate the conversion of the world?

How much then, in view of all these particulars, is depending on the continued and increasing purity, diligence, holiness and zeal of the New England churches. If these churches should prove recreant and reprobate—if they should become cold, worldly, corrupt—if through their sloth darkness should come in to cover the land consecrated by the prayers, and rich with the “garnered dust,” of the puritans—O what hopes on which the minds of angels are now intent, would be blasted. But if these churches are faithful to their Savior, faithful to themselves, and faithful to those great interests of the human race which are committed, as it were, to their keeping—how may they spread the triumphs of the gospel—how may they hold up the light of God’s salvation till its beams shall flash broad and bright over all the nations of a dying world.

Are you a member in one of these churches? A portion of that boundless responsibility, a



greater portion than you can estimate, rests on you. You are teaching, perhaps, a class of little children in the Sabbath school. In that humble office you are forming their minds, as you hope, to all the virtues of benevolence and piety. But what minds are you teaching, and what is to be the sphere of their influence in the years of their maturity? Who dreams that those children are to live and die upon the spot where they were born? They are gathered, it may be, from lowly dwellings, and come to their Sabbath lessons clad in the coarse but clean attire of laborious and cheerful poverty; but who dreams that they are all to live and die in the same humble circumstances in which you find them now? By your labors with them, we will suppose, they are converted to God, and are prepared to "shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life." Who can tell from what stations, and on what distant places, the light which you are now kindling shall shed its salutary radiance in years to come? Who can tell what souls sitting in the shadow of death, shall by and by be enlightened by the christian example and efforts of those who are now your pupils? What a responsibility then, is this? And if you are *not* teaching such a class, when by a little self-denial you might be doing so, and when you have a direct call to undertake the work, what a responsibility are you neglecting.

Look again. There is a revival of religion in the church with which you are connected ; and a hundred souls, newly converted, are gathered into its communion,—most of them, as is always the case, from among the young. Five years hence, where will be those hundred converts ? Some of them indeed will be gone to the dead ; and their graves will be growing green among the green graves of their kindred. Others will be still among you, in your sanctuary, in your Sabbath schools, in your prayer meetings, in your benevolent associations, sharing in all the privileges and responsibilities of your happy New England congregation. But there are others still ; and where are they ? Scattered over all the earth, by the New England spirit of adventure. One is far off upon the sea, praying and reading the bible with his rough ship-mates, sending up the songs of Zion from among the winds and billows of the ocean ; and it is his perhaps to unfurl the Bethel flag, with its dove and olive branch, in some distant port, amidst the frowning symbols of heathen or Mohammedan superstition. Another is in some European country ; and there, if his piety is enlightened and strong enough to withstand the temptations that assail him, he is telling of the privileges, the peace, the light, the spiritual blessings of these favored shores. Others are in the places of education, preparing themselves

to preach the gospel, or are already hastening to the post of peril and of toil beyond the frontier line of christendom. Others, more numerous, are scattered here and there in the cities of the Atlantic, and over the boundless regions of the west, generally much respected for their virtues and usefulness in society, acquiring wealth by their diligence and skill, extending the range of their influence, and, except in rare cases of apostasy, glorifying God by a life of devotion. And wherever they are scattered, there are felt the blessed effects of that revival in New England which converted them to God; and there—if your prayers, your holy zeal, your labors of faith and love, had any thing to do in bringing on or promoting that revival—are felt the blessed effects of your influence as a church-member.

But if you are unfaithful as a servant of Christ; if by your perverseness, or your want of public spirit, the sanctuary of God goes to ruin, and the ministrations of the word cease in the place of your habitation; if your worldliness and selfishness, and your deadness to the things of religion, are such as to grieve the Spirit of Christ, and hang with a dead weight on the activity of your brethren; if your example, or your temper of heart is hindering the revival of religion around you; nay if any influence which you could contribute to increase the purity and strength, the active and efficient piety of your own church

and its sister churches, is withheld,—who shall tell us where the mischievous effects of your unfaithfulness shall terminate?—who can estimate the extent of evil for which God may hold you in a fearful sense responsible?

Now let me ask you not to be forgetful of the duties, the privileges and the responsibilities which have been brought to your attention in this book. You are young perhaps; your influence, you feel, is inconsiderable; you are sometimes ready to think that it is of little consequence what stand you take as a church-member. Never yield to such a feeling. Your influence at the present moment on the proceedings of the church, and especially on the opinions and acts of the more advanced members, may be less than the influence of many others; but never allow yourself to feel that what you do, or what you neglect to do, is of little consequence. Young as you are, you are now affecting the souls, shaping the destiny, of your unconverted companions and friends. You are now not only forming your own religious character, but helping to form the character of your equals and associates in the christian cause; and you with them are soon to stand—if God spares you—in the places of the fathers, and to maintain the ancient honors of these churches of the Puritans. Look around you then in the spirit of a true disciple; see what opportunities you enjoy for

personal improvement, or for immediate usefulness ; diligently avail yourself of these opportunities, still keeping your heart near to God, and in all things living not unto yourself, but unto him who died for you and rose again ; do this, and your influence will gradually but surely extend itself ; your path, luminous with holiness, will shine more and more unto the perfect day ; and when you come to heaven, you shall know that you have not lived in vain, and shall share in the blessedness of those concerning whom it is written, that they shall shine as the brightness of the firmament forever.

## **APPENDIX.**

Note A. p. 26.

The subject of creeds and confessions of faith is one so much debated,—and one the relations of which to the New England churches, are so extensively misunderstood among our brethren of some other denominations, that a few additional remarks in this place seem to be demanded.

Among the ordinary uses of creeds and confessions, the following may be enumerated.

1. They are used as forms, in making a public profession of faith in the gospel. Such is their customary use in our churches; and to such a use, provided the form is not exceptionable, I know not how any reasonable man can object.

2. They are used as terms of communion;—as when the position is taken, No man shall be received to our church, who will not subscribe, or assent to, our formulary. In respect to this it ought to be remembered, that no formulary which is designed for such a use, ought to include any thing beyond those points, the understanding and belief of which is essential to a credible profession of christianity.

3. They are used as standards of orthodoxy, or as guards against error, and securities for uni-

formity of belief in the ministry or among churches. As to the utility of creeds when employed for such a purpose, I must be allowed to express a doubt. In the *first* place, reason and experience demonstrate that such standards cannot secure a complete uniformity of religious opinions, even among those who subscribe them. Every formulary or summary of doctrines, drawn up by human wit and skill, or even planned under the guidance of superhuman wisdom, if it be framed in human language, or if human minds are to interpret it, must needs be liable to different constructions. This is the case with the Bible. This is the case with all constitutions, laws, treaties, contracts, carefully and technically as they are worded. This is the case with all confessions of faith. As to the law was added the Mishna, and to the Mishna the Gemara ; so those who attempt to interpret the Bible by the standard of their confession, find themselves presently constrained to interpret that confession by some unwritten or written "tradition of the elders." What volumes of commentary and of controversy, have been written to elucidate and fix the meaning of such standards. At this hour, the meaning of the thirty-nine articles and of the accompanying prayer-book, is as much a matter of dispute as the meaning of the Bible. The same thing is true of the Westminster confession, with the catechisms shorter and

longer. Who does not know that there is more diversity of religious opinion in the church of England, more in the church of Scotland, more in the Episcopal church, and in the Presbyterian church, in this country, than there is in those Congregational churches and ministers of New England, which acknowledge each other as churches and ministers of Jesus Christ. The only security for uniformity, is a dead indifference. The only security for peace among brethren that think and inquire, is love and liberty.

In the *next* place, such formularies cannot keep out error. Have they kept out error at Geneva? in Germany? in England? in Scotland? Did they keep error out of the King's chapel in Boston?—out of Tammany street church in Baltimore? out of one community after another which has been lopped off from the Presbyterian body in the United States? The Cumberland Presbyterians—the Davisites—*et id omne genus*—whence came they? where did they fall into their errors? The best guard against error is the free discussion and defense of the truth, and the love of the truth as the means of converting sinners, and of transforming the soul into the image of God.

*Again*, it deserves to be remarked that no form of assent to a prescribed confession, can answer any good purpose without a personal



examination of the candidate, as to the matter and the grounds of his religious belief. This, if I mistake not, the most zealous advocates for the efficacy of Confessions, are ready to admit. I ask then, what is the utility of the prescribed Confession, the formulary being worth nothing without the examination, and the examination being sufficient without the formula? Why is not an examination to ascertain whether a man intelligently and orthodoxly receives the doctrines of the Bible, as satisfactory, as an examination to ascertain whether he intelligently and orthodoxly receives the doctrines of the Confession of faith?

Once more, such standards are not indispensable as definitions and tests of orthodoxy. In the American Presbyterian church, for example, it is not every particular of the confession and catechism, which is essential to orthodoxy in a church-member, or in a minister. If it were so, how absurd would be the provisions which exist, for the amendment of those standards. If a belief in the unlawfulness of a man's marrying his deceased wife's sister, be essential to orthodoxy, then surely a motion to strike that point of doctrine out of the Confession, would necessarily subject the mover, and every vote for such a motion would subject the voter to a process for heresy. If then, to prove a man a heretic, you must prove that he disbelieves some

point material to "the system of doctrine" contained in the Confession; why not prove at once, that the point denied is material to the "system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." If the error of a religious opinion cannot be demonstrated by reasoning out of the Scriptures, can it be satisfactorily demonstrated to Protestants in any other way?

4. Another use of confessions, is to declare to the public what views of some particular points, or of the whole scheme of christian doctrine, are in fact held by a church, or a community of churches, or by an individual, or an association of individuals. Thus Luther and Melancthon, on behalf of themselves and their associates, drew up and presented to the emperor Charles V. at the diet of Augsburg, in 1550, the celebrated Augustan or Augsburg Confession, designed to represent to the emperor and to that assembly, the real opinions of the reformers, as distinguished on the one hand from the doctrines of the Papists, and on the other hand from the doctrines ascribed to them by their adversaries. Thus the Congregational churches of England, in 1658, having been misrepresented and traduced in respect to their religious principles and order, met by their messengers, at the Savoy in London, and published to the world the Savoy Confession, or "a declaration of the faith and order, owned and practiced in the Congrega-

tional churches in England." Thus the elders and messengers of the churches in the colony of Massachusetts, being assembled in Boston, in 1680, expressed publicly their approval of the Savoy Confession, as exhibiting the doctrines of their churches. "There have been some," they say, "who have reflected upon our New English churches, for our defect in this matter, as if our principles were unknown; whereas it is well-known that as to matters of doctrine, we agree with other reformed churches. Nor was it that, but what concerns worship and discipline, that caused our fathers to come into this wilderness, while it was a land not sown, that so they might have liberty to practice accordingly. And it is a ground of holy rejoicing before the Lord, that now there is no advantage left for those that may be disaffected towards us, to object any thing of that nature against us." The same Confession was afterwards acknowledged by the Synod at Saybrook in 1708, as exhibiting the faith of the churches of the colony of Connecticut.

This brings us to the name of that gorgon so terrible to some of our brethren of other denominations, the *Saybrook Platform*. Well, what is the Saybrook Platform? It is *not* that confession of faith just referred to, which was owned and approved by the Synod at Saybrook, as it had been by the previous Synod at Boston.

It is *not* the "Hheads of Agreement" between Congregational and Presbyterian ministers, which were drawn up and consented to at London, about the year 1690, and which the Saybrook Synod approved and recommended. It is simply those fifteen articles of discipline which were drawn up by that Synod, and recommended to the churches by the legislature, as supplying certain supposed deficiencies of the Cambridge Platform, and providing for the more perfect communion of the churches. The Saybrook Platform is, or was, the constitution of the associations and consociations of Connecticut.

But after all, what is the actual relation of this Savoy Confession to the Congregational churches? I answer, as a test or standard of truth, as a scheme of faith prescribed for the belief of our ministers or church-members, as a condition of communion, as a piece of legislation, it has no authority at all. By the Synod of Saybrook, which consisted of twelve pastors and four messengers, it was agreed that the confession referred to, "be recommended to the honorable general assembly of this Colony at the next session, for their public testimony thereunto, as the faith of the churches of this Colony." But neither the platform, nor the subsequent proceedings of the legislature, approving and establishing the doings of the Synod, contained any provision for the adoption of

this confession by ministers, or by church-members. The whole transaction, then, as we understand it, was in fact only a public testimony that such was at that time, the faith of the churches of Connecticut, just as the Synod at Boston had previously testified to the same formula as expressing the common faith of the churches of Massachusetts. The authority of that confession then, is the authority of a historical document. The votes of the Synods concerning it, as the faith of the New England churches, are testimony to a matter of fact, by competent and unquestionable witnesses.

Do you ask what is *now* the faith of these churches? I answer, they still hold the faith of their fathers. They do not indeed regard themselves as responsible for the particular phraseology, the arrangement, the illustrations, of that Confession assented to by the Synods at Boston and Saybrook, or for every individual principle which it involves; but still they regard it as containing "for the substance," "the system of doctrines taught in the holy scripture." This is evident from the formularies used in individual churches, and from the repeated and frequent acts of associations, councils, and other ecclesiastical bodies. This is evident from the course of inquiry whenever a candidate is examined, concerning his fitness to preach the gospel, or to be introduced into the pastoral of-

face. This is evident from the preaching in our pulpits, from our psalmody, and from the tenor of our public and domestic prayers. It is no less evident from the writings of our divines, as they are daily given to the world, whether in the form of controversy with opposers, or of discussion with each other. It is evident from the books which are most read and valued among our ministers and church-members, and which are commonly regarded as our standard authors.\* The cry sometimes raised, that there is no way of determining what we do believe, if it be not a mere pretense, must proceed from great ignorance and blindness.

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Note B, p. 44.

The idea of the gradual formation and organization of the apostolic churches, while it seems to lie upon the very surface of the New Testament, is the key to many difficulties in the controversy which has been agitated for two centuries and a half, about church officers. For a more extended illustration of that idea, the learned reader is referred to Plank's *Geschichte der christlichen Gesellschafts-Verfassung*. vol. i. pp. 1—50.

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\* Among these books, DWIGHT'S THEOLOGY has probably the best title to be considered as a complete exhibition of the faith of our churches.

One of the most serious objections urged against the system of church order, proposed and set up by the fathers of the New England churches, was that their system had no place for ministers at large, servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, like Titus, Timothy, Apollos, and others of the New Testament, without a particular pastoral care. The difficulty was one which they seem to have felt, and which they hardly knew how to dispose of. Hence their inquiries, and sometimes their disagreements among themselves, about such questions as, whether a pastor has any right to perform ministerial acts out of his own church. But the distinction made in the chapter to which this note refers, between the *work* of preaching the gospel, as a regular minister or servant of Christ, and the *office* of a pastor and overseer in the church, is now universally recognized among congregationalists. Instead of supposing, with the fathers, that Titus, Timothy and Apollos, were men called to an altogether extraordinary work, and thus were invested only with powers to which none since their day have succeeded, we have now our evangelists, devoted to the work of the ministry by the laying on of hands, recognized in all the churches as ministers of Jesus Christ, yet having no official rank or authority, and sustaining no relation to any church, other than the relations of a private brother. These men labor among the churches

in word and doctrine, as they find opportunity, or go out upon their work to distant places. Some travel from one church to another, stirring up the minds of the faithful to enterprises of benevolence. Some give themselves, as they may be called, to the aid of pastors and churches, where revivals of religion call for extraordinary evangelical labors. Some are employed as teachers in colleges and schools of divinity. Others go abroad into the less privileged regions of the land, and to the heathen nations, as ministers of the word of life, and ambassadors for God; and there like the apostles, they gather believers into churches, and "ordain them elders in every city." The relations of these men to the pastors of the churches, are those of brethren and fellow-laborers in the work of the gospel; they are often members of the associations of ministers, and as such, aid in examining and recommending proper persons as candidates for the work of the ministry; sometimes they bear a part with pastors, in the solemn ordination of other evangelists and pastors. If it be asked what *power* they have, I answer they have the power of doing all the good which their talents and opportunities will permit them to do; and whenever any of them by "signs and wonders and mighty deeds" give evidence of apostolic inspiration, they have the apostolic power of deciding what hath seemed good to



the Holy Ghost ; but as for any other sort of power in or over the churches, they have none at all. A pastor on the other hand, has the power of president and overseer in his church.

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Note C. p. 66.

If an intelligent christian man, should find himself cast among pagans, with the Bible in his hand, and without any means of intercourse with evangelized countries ; and if, after a few months residence there, he should find himself sufficiently acquainted with the language of those around him, to communicate to some among them, in the way of solitary and personal instruction, a knowledge of the gospel ; and if this use of his faculty of teaching, should gradually qualify him for the work of public speaking,—to him in such circumstances, no ordination, no license, no examination or approval, would be necessary, as a preliminary to his undertaking the employment of a public preacher of the christian religion. He would be just as really authorized to proclaim to those dying sinners, the doctrines and invitations of the gospel, praying them in Christ's stead, "Be ye reconciled to God," as if he had been consecrated to that work, by the hands of all the prelates and presbyteries in christendom. And if any of those heathen, repenting under his la-

bors, and converted to God, should say to him, "See here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized;" he would be authorized to reply, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest;" and without fearing any man's prohibition, he might baptize them at once unto the name of the Lord. When his converts had become sufficiently numerous and properly instructed, he might form them into a regular church, teaching them to hold communion not only in prayer and doctrine, but in the breaking of bread; and their eating bread and drinking wine in memory of Christ, would be not only as valid, but as regular and orderly as the like ordinance in any church whatever. In like manner, at a proper time, he might lead them to the choice of bishops and deacons; and the persons thus chosen might be ordained by prayer and the laying on of hands, and would need no other consecration to their office. So other churches might be gathered by his labors; and in the course of years, he might find around him a sisterhood of churches, rejoicing in the truth and walking in the fellowship of the gospel. All this would be "done decently and in order;" and these churches upon becoming acquainted with other communities of christians, would have a right to be recognized as churches of Christ; nor would there be any occasion for the rebaptism of their members, or the reordi-

nation of their officers. A church of christians, walking in fellowship and love, and observing all the ordinances of the christian religion, is a christian church, no matter when or where it had its origin. The question respecting its title to communion and respect, is not a question of heraldry and "endless genealogy;" it is simply the question whether it is *now* holding the faith, and performing the functions, of a church of Christ. The pedigree of a horse may be important; that of a church, or of a minister is of little consequence. By their fruit ye shall know them,—not by their lineage and descent.

But from these principles does it follow that it would be orderly and right for any and every man, in a christian community, to undertake, of his own mere motion, the work of a public minister of Jesus Christ? Is it "decent and in order" for him to decide, without seeking anybody's advice or approbation, that he is called of God to the business of preaching, and to thrust himself upon the christian public accordingly? Nay would not such an unadvised and self-confident intrusion into a work so difficult and responsible, prove the man to be exceedingly unfitted for that work? What is plainer than that in order to guard the churches against imposition, and to maintain the purity, dignity, and efficiency of the ministry, there must be some common understanding as to the

manner in which suitable candidates for that work shall be introduced to the notice and confidence of the churches, for the trial of their gifts. Among the congregational churches of Great Britain, there are at this day, if I am rightly informed, no conventional regulations or definite agreement, prescribing the mode in which candidates for the ministry shall be examined concerning their fitness, and, if found worthy, recommended to the public. The consequence is that the standard of attainments in the ministry, is decidedly less elevated among those churches, than among the churches of the same name on this side of the Atlantic. Here this matter is distinctly provided for in our ecclesiastical organization. Our pastors are all associated for mutual improvement and helpfulness, for the consideration of all such questions for advice as may be submitted to them in their associated capacity, and for the examination and orderly introduction of candidates for the ministry.

The following description of these associations, and of their functions, is from Upham's *Ratio Disciplinæ*, Chapters xi and xii.

"The formal and permanent union of ministers, within certain convenient limits, in what are termed ASSOCIATIONS, may justly be regarded as a part of the Congregational polity. Stated meetings of ministers, which may be traced back

to the earliest days of these churches, were approved and recommended in particular by the venerable Hooker. It is affirmed that during the whole of his ministerial life, the pastors in the neighborhood of his residence, held frequent meetings for the purpose of mutual consultation and advice in religious things. One of the last and emphatic sayings of this father of the churches was, *We must agree upon constant meetings of ministers.*

“The advice and example of such a man, in whom his brethren, and the churches at large had been accustomed to place the greatest confidence, was not without its effect. The ministers in other neighborhoods soon began to hold similar meetings; and with profitable results. As early as 1690, such ministerial meetings or associations had been formed throughout the country. They have multiplied with the increase of the churches and pastors; and at the present time exceed sixty in number.

“Of the various objects of pastoral associations, one is an increased mutual friendship and support, which cannot be had without an intimate and regulated intercourse. Exposed to peculiar labors and trials, the pastors of churches are often brought within the influence of that principle of human nature, which leads men to solicit, at such times, aid and sympathy. And it is the natural result of our mental constitution, that

brotherly love should be increased by brotherly support.

“Another object is, that they may improve by means of common consultation and inquiry, in the knowledge of those things, which particularly pertain to their important calling. They exchange opinions, and examine, with each other’s assistance, the Holy Scriptures. They propose and solve cases of duty and conscience ; they disclose to each other the state of their respective churches ; and consider, as becomes persons in their situations, of the means, which shall tend to the increase of personal holiness and the spread of the gospel abroad.

“Such being the objects of ministerial associations, they are approved by the churches at large ; the more especially as they are generally made the occasions not only of private supplication, but of public religious services.

“Ministerial associations in the first instance are usually of no great extent ; being limited for the most part by the civil divisions of counties. They are governed by written constitutions of their own framing ; which not only state the objects, for which they are formed, but authorize the choice of the necessary officers, and indicate the times and places of meeting.

“But from these minor bodies, have been formed General or State associations, extending over the limits of a whole State. They are

composed of delegates, chosen from the minor or county associations, and, like them, are governed by a written constitution. Assemblies of this description exist at the present time in the States of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire.

“One of the benefits consequent on the formation of these enlarged clerical bodies, and which results from the primary associations only in an inferior degree, is, that it extends the acquaintance of the pastors with each other ; and of course that mutual friendship and support in the duties and trials of their stations, which has already been spoken of. Nor is this all.—Coming from different parts of their respective States, furnished from various sources of information, and viewing subjects in different and novel lights, they are the means of increasing and diffusing religious knowledge. Indeed all the benefits, which may be expected to result from the minor bodies, result from the General Associations in a still higher degree.

“Like the minor associations, they, from time to time, discuss questions of a theoretical or practical nature ; they watch the prevailing vices of the times, and warn against them ; and endeavor by their persuasive addresses to indicate the path of duty, and to encourage to a religious life. To do good in the best sense of the phrase, is their design, and they, therefore, look upon

any topic, having a relation to the intellectual, moral, and religious well-being of mankind both at home and abroad, a suitable subject of inquiry.

"The meetings of the State associations are commonly held a number of days; there are public religious exercises, as well as assemblies of business and inquiry; and the whole is closed by the solemn administration of the Lord's Supper.

"As the bodies under consideration are composed exclusively of ministers, some persons might conjecture, that they would attract towards themselves the suspicious and unfriendly regards of laymen. But it is not so. They have been too frank in the disclosure of their principles and designs, too prudent in their proceedings, to cause such undesirable results. Neither the primary nor the general associations consider themselves authorized to take measures arbitrarily to control, or in any way to restrict the liberties of the churches. This is not their right, nor their object, nor their desire. Attempts of such a nature would at once alienate that respect and affection, with which they are now regarded.

"The General Association of Massachusetts, in the records of their annual meeting in 1807, expressly aver, that their body 'is founded on the pure principles of Congregationalism. One design of it is to cherish, strengthen, and trans-



mit these principles. It wholly disclaims ecclesiastical power or authority over the churches, or the opinions of individuals.’ ”

It ought to be added here that the General Associations of the several States maintain a fraternal correspondence with each other, and with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church, by the regular interchange of delegates. This arrangement promotes the communion and mutual confidence of all the Congregational churches ; and at the same time forms a tie between them on the one hand, and the churches of the Presbyterian order on the other, which has so bound them together for these many years, and has secured great benefits not only for the parties, but for the common cause of the gospel of Christ. Whether these arrangements might be made more complete and effectual, by means of a General Congregational Union, in the annual meetings of which every particular association in the United States, might be represented, and which should occasionally send delegates to the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and to that of Scotland,—is a question which I submit to the consideration of brethren wiser and more experienced than myself.

“ In settling the government and order of these churches, it became a serious inquiry, in what way preachers should be first introduced into

their work. No object was more dear to our forefathers, than the maintenance of a pure and faithful ministry. And it was, therefore, deemed important to exercise a watch over the first attempts at entering into the sacred office.

“It was not altogether obvious at first, what course should be pursued, in order to secure the great object, which our devout ancestors had in view. But, with characteristic and pious confidence, they trusted to the suggestions of time and providence for the ultimate settlement of every thing in the best manner. One thing they well knew, that, if the ministry became corrupt, it would be altogether in vain, that they had transported themselves and their families ‘over the vast ocean to these goings down of the sun.’

“For many years no particular plan seems to have been adopted. If persons could produce testimonials of church relationship, and of having passed through some approved system of education, they were permitted by the particular churches, with which they happened to be, to preach to them. It appears from Wise, (in his *Church’s Quarrel Espoused, or A Reply to certain Proposals, &c.* Sect. IV.) that as late as the year 1700, the chief test and trial, which was undergone, previous to the trial of ordination, was personal conversation, occasional preaching as opportunity presented, and a col-

lege degree or other testimonials of a literary kind.

“But it was seen after a time, that such a course would in the end prove greatly detrimental to the character of the ministry, and to the cause of religion. And yet no means were devised, notwithstanding the solicitude of the churches, to settle this part of the Congregational Polity, until after the forming of clerical Associations, of which some account has just been given.

“It appears from Article Sixth of Mather’s *Ratio Disciplinae*, that the subject of licensing to preach was taken up and particularly considered in a convention of ministers, held at Boston about the beginning of the last century. The plan proposed was, that no person should be allowed to preach without being furnished with a testimonial under the hands of at least four or five settled pastors. And these pastors were required, previously to giving such testimonial, to examine him in relation to his manner of life, his motives, and his literary and theological acquisitions.

“This was one step, and a very considerable one, towards referring this important business to permanent associations of ministers, which at this time had been generally formed through the country. At a meeting of associated ministers, held at Boston, the 13th of September,

1705, the subject was brought under examination, and it was proposed to the churches, and advised as follows :

*“ That the candidates for the ministry, [not to settle, but merely to preach,] undergo a due trial by some or other of the association, concerning their qualification for the evangelical ministry; and that no particular pastor or congregation employ any one in occasional preaching, who has not been recommended by a testimonial under the hands of some Association.*

“ The churches by degrees fell in with the plan, which was thus proposed to them ; and it at length became a part of their settled polity. At a meeting of the General Association, (Convention, as the State Assembly of ministers was then called,) of New-Hampshire, held at Exeter, July 29, 1747, it was voted as follows : Whereas we think piety and learning, particularly a good acquaintance with the scriptures, and a conversation as becomes the gospel, necessary qualifications, among others mentioned by the apostle, in a preacher of the gospel ; we **AGREE** not to encourage or approve any as candidates for the ministry till they are recommended by some Association ; unless they are persons, who have preached for some time, and have been approved of by ministers and churches acquainted with them.

“ It is deemed, therefore, against the order of

these churches for a person to offer himself as a preacher without a testimonial or a license from an Association ; and also for a church to accept of such an offer, and thus encourage an irregular proceeding. Licenses are granted, however, by the Minor or Primary, and not by the General Associations.

“The persons, applying for such purposes, undergo an examination ; and the great responsibility, therefore, of introducing an ignorant or an immoral person into the ministry, rests with the body, to whom this power is committed. They are bound to withhold their assent to the request for a license, until they are satisfied, that the applicant possesses the requisite qualifications. And it is implied in this, that they are to obtain satisfactory evidence of moral and religious character, of church relationship, of worthy motives and desires in reference to the ministry, and of suitable attainments in literature and theological knowledge.

“There is reason to believe, that the confidence of the churches has not been misplaced, and that the power of licensing to preach has been rightly and wisely reposed in the Association.

“No uniform principle appears to be established in respect to the time, for which licences are given. Generally they are without limit, but sometimes are given for a few months, a year, or two years, or other designated period. In

such cases, they may be renewed at the expiration of the specified time, if the applicant sees fit, and no objections have arisen.

“ Every license is in such form, and expressed in such language, as the Association deems most suitable; but generally it is concise and merely to this import :—That the person, having appeared before the Association at the time and place mentioned, had given them satisfactory evidence of a good moral and religious character, and of regular church standing; That the Association are satisfied also in respect to his literary and theological qualifications; And that they accordingly testify their approbation of him. as qualified to preach the gospel, and recommend him as such, wherever the Divine Providence may call him.

“ Licences are, from their very nature, conditional. They are given for a particular purpose; and they suppose, both in their present and in their future operation, the existence of certain qualities in the persons, to whom they are granted.

“ The existence of these qualities forms the condition on which the License is granted. If, therefore, the Licentiate be found on public trial either mentally or morally deficient, the Association have a right to annul or revoke the license. This right has been fully acknowledged by the churches; and it is the duty of the re-

spective Associations to see it fully exercised, when occasion requires."

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Note D. p. 160.

"The solemn responsibility of self-government, thus resting upon each separate church, has in itself a powerful tendency to produce that general stability of character, seriousness, carefulness, independence of opinion, and intelligence on public affairs, which so eminently distinguish the people of New England. It has been observed by travelers, that the French people, since the revolution, are no longer distinguished by their levity of spirit. The solemn boon of self-preservation and liberty, is fast forming the nation to a greater severity of character,—thus by another experiment unfolding to us the true cause of the sternness of our puritan fathers. Those who think frivolity a more rational enjoyment than freedom and intelligence, will of course regret the change. The same persons may rail at the sternness of the puritans.

"This acting together, this mutual responsibility and watchfulness and care, this "bearing one another's burdens," forms the only effectual bond of union among the members of a church. Let the care of the members only be in fact,—what it is in the theory of other forms,—thrown upon the officers of the church, and there is nothing

left to attach the individual members to each other. Our plan, on the other hand, lays the care upon the shoulders of every individual. Such responsibility creates a demand for the exercise of piety and intelligence ; and this demand is the only means of producing the supply. Spirituality, zeal for the purity of the church, brotherly watchfulness, fidelity, and love, require exercise to make them grow. While other forms treat the people as children, incapable of self-government, they take the very course to keep them always children." *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, vol. iii. p. 385.

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Note E. p. 160.

In addition to what is said respecting the communion of churches, in the passage here referred to, and in chapter vii, it seems proper to introduce here, the following remarks, selected, like the foregoing, from an able exposition and defense of Congregationalism in the *Christian Spectator* for September 1831.

"The greatest difficulty which is found, in conveying to those who are accustomed to other modes of church government, a clear understanding of congregational principles, respects the relation or connection of separate churches. Most of the objections which we have heard against the institutions of our fathers, have gone upon the idea that they held the churches to be



independent of each other, as if each church were a world itself. Nothing can be farther from the truth. The congregational churches never were independents. As proof, we give two extracts, one from Thomas Hooker, the father of congregationalism in Connecticut, the other from the Synod of Cambridge, which was held A. D. 1648, and composed of "the Elders and Messengers," or pastors and delegates, of all the New England churches, including Mr. Cotton of Boston, and the greater part of the ministers that *first* came to America.

" ' She, (the church,) is so far subject to the consociation of churches, that she is bound, in case of doubt and difficulty, to crave their counsel, and if it be according to God, to follow it : and if she shall err from the rule, and continue obstinate therein, they have authority to renounce the right hand of fellowship with her.

" ' In the second sense, the church may be said to be independent, namely, sufficient to attain her end ; and therefore hath complete power, being rightly constituted, to exercise all the ordinances of God.' Survey, Part ii. p. 80.

" ' Although churches be distinct, and therefore may not be confounded one with another, and equal, and therefore have no dominion one over another ; yet all churches ought to preserve church communion one with another, because they are all united unto Christ, not only

as a mystical, but as a political head, whence is derived a communion suitable thereto. Rev. i. 4; Cant. viii. 8; Rom. xvi. 16; 1 Cor. xvi. 19; Acts xv. 23; Rev. ii. 1.' Platform, ch. xv.

"The obligation of churches to perform the various acts of fellowship, arises from their relation to each other and to their common Lord. It does not arise from any express agreement to be in fellowship; nor does it depend on their more or less complete coincidence in doctrine and practice, but on the simple fact that they are churches of Christ. As such, they have a common interest, are pursuing a common object, possess a common character, serve a common Lord, and live in a common hope; and their relations are such, that each is deeply interested in the welfare of the other. If one suffers by declension, error, iniquity, or persecution, all suffer, for the *cause* suffers. This communion of churches therefore, is not at all confined to churches that are congregational in form, or Calvinistic in doctrine. It is due to all who afford evidence that Jesus Christ owns them as *his* churches. It is actually exercised to all, whose ministers we allow to preach, whose members we admit to the Lord's table with us, or to whom we extend any act of christian recognition or intercourse.

"It follows then, that all christian churches are bound to exercise mutual care and sympathy,

and aid, doing one another good to the extent of their power ; and that they have a right to advise and admonish each other. When a church, by its conduct, ceases to exhibit credible evidence that it is a christian church, it is proper that other churches should cease to hold communion with it, as such. From this fellowship of churches, there results as much mutual power, restraint, and influence, as is consistent with their freedom and distinctness, and enough to answer all the purposes to be answered by church organization and discipline. Churches have a relation and influence and responsibility, like that which would be created, if a number of christians should be thrown together in a heathen country, and should there be desirous of doing what they could to promote the gospel around them. We may take the case of christian missionaries, of different sects, at Malta, as an instance. Each would feel tenderly alive to the spiritual welfare and purity of all the rest, and would be under obligations to sacrifice every thing but the law of God, and a good conscience, for the sake of mutual fellowship and brotherhood. They would also exert a powerful influence over each other. No one would feel warranted to take any important step, affecting their common object, without consulting his brethren ; nor would any one feel at liberty to act contrary to their deliberate judgment and

advice, unless he had very weighty reasons for so doing. In any case of embarrassment or doubt or difficulty, even about the management of his own private affairs, each would still feel that it was his privilege and duty to avail himself of their counsel and aid. Sometimes he might apply to an individual, and sometimes in more weighty affairs, to a select council of several. If they found him pursuing a course which was likely to be injurious, they would kindly advise him. If he was doing wrong, so as to bring a reproach upon religion, or weaken their hands, or embarrass their efforts in the good cause, they would admonish him of it; and if occasion required, they might go in a body, in order to give greater weight to their remonstrances. If they found him perverse, or blinded with passion, so that they could not act with him, nor recognize him as a christian brother, they would feel it necessary to withdraw from him, until he should come to himself again. All this while, there could be no act of authority, no assumption of power, by one over the rest, or by the community over the individuals, no means used, but those of advice and persuasion, no influence but 'light and love.'

"Persons so situated would also very naturally fall into certain modes and habits of intercourse and business, for mutual convenience, and the furtherance of their common end. And

these modes, whether established by express agreement, or only by usage, would have a sort of binding force, so that no individual would feel at liberty to depart from them, unless they were about to lead him into that which was wrong, or for some other very powerful reason. And yet they would not be *laws*, because each individual would still feel at liberty to break them, rather than break the laws of Jesus Christ. They would be merely conventional articles, subordinate to the laws of Christ, and subordinate to their great and common end. Each would thus preserve his own individuality, and be answerable to his own Master, and stand or fall by his own acts. He could never plead the acts, or requirements, or usages of the rest, as a justification of himself. The Cambridge Platform has this very illustration of the power of churches towards each other.

“‘Paul had no authority over Peter, yet when he saw Peter not walking with a right foot, he publicly rebuked him before the church. Though churches have no more authority one over another, than one apostle has over another, yet as one apostle might admonish another, so may one church admonish another, and yet without usurpation.’

“In times of declension, when churches often act from passion or interest, and when errors creep in, it is very natural that good men should

wish for some arm of *power*, to remove the evils. But the mischief is, that this power is just as likely to be placed where it will feel the effects of the declension. The majority of ministers, and the great body of the churches in New England, have ever resisted the accumulation of church power in few hands, and have retained the final prerogative of the churches in all cases, so that now, by common consent, the acts of councils are regarded, as they were by Cotton, and Mather, and Hooker, as advisory only."

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Note F. p. 165.

New England was settled, not by romantic adventurers, seeking liberty in the abstract, but by men of piety, men of great learning, men of a truly heroic spirit, and yet of extraordinary soberness and common sense, who came three thousand miles, that here in this wild solitude they might have room, and freedom, to pursue their investigations respecting church order, and to apply their results to practice.

"The men who colonized this northern wilderness, laid out their strength on the subject of church government. Their best ministers employed their most diligent labors, continually, for many years, in seeking and exhibiting the light which the word of God throws on this subject. It is sufficient to refer to the labors of

John Cotton, first minister of Boston, of Norton and Shepard, of Increase Mather, of John Owen in England, and of Thomas Hooker, first minister of Hartford. Cotton's "Power of the Keys," was the first book on that subject written in America. Owen sat down to confute it, and was so convinced by it, that he became a zealous congregationalist all his days. Hooker wrote his "Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline," and sent it to England for publication in 1646, but the copy was lost, with the ship which bore it, and many valuable lives. He was immediately urged to re-write it, which he did. But before it had received the finishing stroke, he was called to his rest. He was a man of eminent gifts, was one of the most powerful preachers in New England, and still more remarkable for his prayers, a man of great learning and skill, having distinguished himself at Emanuel College, Cambridge, Eng. His sermons were searching and experimental. He was rich in charities, and his family exhibited the power of godliness. For many years before his death, he had been in the habitual enjoyment of a comfortable assurance of God's favor, and when dying, said, "I am going to receive mercy;" then closing his own eyes, he expired with a smile on his countenance.

"This is a specimen of the ministers under whose instructions the pilgrims formed their

character. These men regarded the question of church government as one of the chief things that require christian investigation in the latter days. They felt a conviction, that they were laying foundations for the final glory of the church, and that it was an important time to inquire for truth. Says Hooker in his preface, "truth seemeth to be in travell, having fulfilled her appointed months, and the instant opportunity of her deliverance drawing on apace." They had large expectations concerning the progress of the church in the knowledge of divine things; and church order was one of the main subjects on which they expected and desired additional light.

"Hooker has doubtless expressed a common sentiment among them, where he says,

"These two things seem to be great reserves of inquiry for this last age of the world.

"1. Wherein the spirituall will of Christ's kingdome consists, the manner how it is revealed and dispensed to the souls of his servants inwardly.

"2. The order and manner how the government of his kingdom is managed outwardly in his churches.

"Upon these two hinges the tedious agitations that are stirring in the earth turn—to set forwards the *shakings of heaven and earth*, which are to be seen even at this day.'



“The successors of these men have pursued the first of these inquiries, concerning the operations of divine grace in regeneration and sanctification, with diligence and with much success. The other has been of late too much neglected.

“As another evidence of the interest which our fathers felt in the subject, we quote from Increase Mather, President of Harvard college, a man of eminent piety and learning, and a very discerning mind.

“‘I profess, I look upon the discovery and settlement of the congregational way as the boon, the gratuity, the largess of divine bounty, which the Lord graciously bestowed on his people, that followed him into this wilderness. Here good people that came over, shewed more love, zeal, and affectionate desire of communion with God in *pure* worship and ordinances, and did more in order to it, than others; and the Lord did more for them than for any people in the world, in showing them the pattern of his house, and the true scriptural way of church government and administrations.’

“Such men, so qualified, did not take up a question which they deemed so important, and decide it without inquiry or argument. They had also many peculiar advantages for deciding it right. They were not acting under any control as to church government. Indeed they met this question more free from civil entanglements,

than any other modern churches. The whole power of civil affairs was in the hands of members of the church. Their community was in fact, what no other has been, a christian commonwealth. This made them differ from all the reformed churches of Europe, every one of which regulated its policy under more or less influence from government. They had no human founder. There was no one man, living or dead, whose opinion was authority with them, as that of Calvin was to the presbyterians, and that of Wesley to the methodists. They had every interest in favor of deciding right, for they cast themselves wholly upon God's protection, having no human hope whatever when they left their country. Of course they could only expect the divine blessing on their enterprise, by so forming their institutions as to please God. They acted under the distinct perception that they were called to serve God specifically in this way, by establishing such church order as, on the fullest inquiry, should appear most agreeable to his will. They were also called to suffer the loss of all things, on the very account of their mode of procedure in church affairs. No other churches have ever been so specifically called to act and suffer on this very point, and had therefore so much reason to expect a special divine guidance in regard to it.

“ The clergy also came well prepared to their

investigations. The body of them were men of learning, and their minds were strengthened by the times in which they lived. They could not have been brought to the adoption of the congregational plan by the love of power, for it is the very essence of congregationalism that it throws all power into the hands of the people, and decides all church questions by the vote of the majority. They could not have been driven to it reluctantly by the spirit of liberty among the people, for there never were ministers who enjoyed more of the confidence and respect of their congregations. They embodied a large share of the learning in the community. They were the devoted friends of civil liberty. Many of them were possessed of considerable estates, which they freely expended for the common good. The magistrates and people were in the constant practice of consulting the ministers in regard to all important measures. All this shows that congregationalism did not arise out of any popular jealousy, guarding against clerical usurpation.

“Congregationalism, therefore, was established by the deliberate, unbiassed, intelligent, solemn and prayerful judgment of a large number of sober and pious men, who set themselves to the inquiry under the weightiest responsibilities, and risked every thing upon its being according to the will of God. As such, it has a claim to

a respectful hearing. We submit it to the candid judgment of our readers, whether they can mention any body of christians since the days of the aposles, who have settled their church order under circumstances so favorable to the prevalence of simple truth, and the mere authority of the word of God ; and whether there is any church organization, which from the known circumstances in which it originated, could seem so likely to have been adopted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, vol. iii. pp. 361, 364.

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Note G.

It has been no part of my design in this book to exhibit the peculiarities of different forms of church government in contrast with each other. But as the question is often asked, What are the distinctive principles of Congregationalism? a few words on that point will not be out of place here.

1. Congregationalism is distinguished from all sorts of prelacy, Roman, Oriental, English, and Wesleyan, by the principle that all Christ's servants in the work of the gospel, are equal in rank.

2. It is distinguished from Episcopacy and Presbyterianism, by the principle that the only organized church is a particular church, a con-

gregation of believers statedly meeting in one place. A provincial or national church, including many particular churches, and governed by general officers, has no place in the Congregational system.

3. It is distinguished from the forementioned systems, by the principle that all church power resides in the church, and not in church officers; and resides in each particular church directly and originally, by virtue of the express or implied compact of its members, and not traditionally, or by virtue of any authority derived by succession from some higher body, ecclesiastical or clerical.

4. It is distinguished from strict Independency, by the principle of the communion of churches.

5. It is distinguished from the system of the Baptist churches, by the principle of the right of believing parents to dedicate their infant children to God in baptism; by the principle that in the ceremony of baptism it is not material how much water is used, or whether the water is applied to the person or the person to the water; and by the principle of open communion with all who make a credible profession of being Christ's disciples.

As to the difference between the congregational system and the presbyterian, two points may be stated more distinctly.

1. A Congregational church, like a Presbyterian church, may have its ruling elders; but while the presbyterian system makes the elders accountable, not to the church, but to some "superior judicature," Congregationalism permits nothing to be done in the name of the church, without the distinct consent of the brotherhood.

2. A Congregational church may hold communion and intercourse with sister churches by means of such bodies as presbyteries and synods; but, while Presbyterianism regards these bodies as "judicatures," "courts of the Lord Jesus Christ," having authority to decide all controversies judicially, and to "send down" their injunctions to the churches,—Congregationalism must needs regard them only as meetings for intercourse and communion, as councils to advise and persuade in matters of common interest, and as means of keeping up a common feeling among the neighboring and the distant members of the great union. Congregationalism acknowledges no power over the churches but the power of LIGHT AND LOVE.

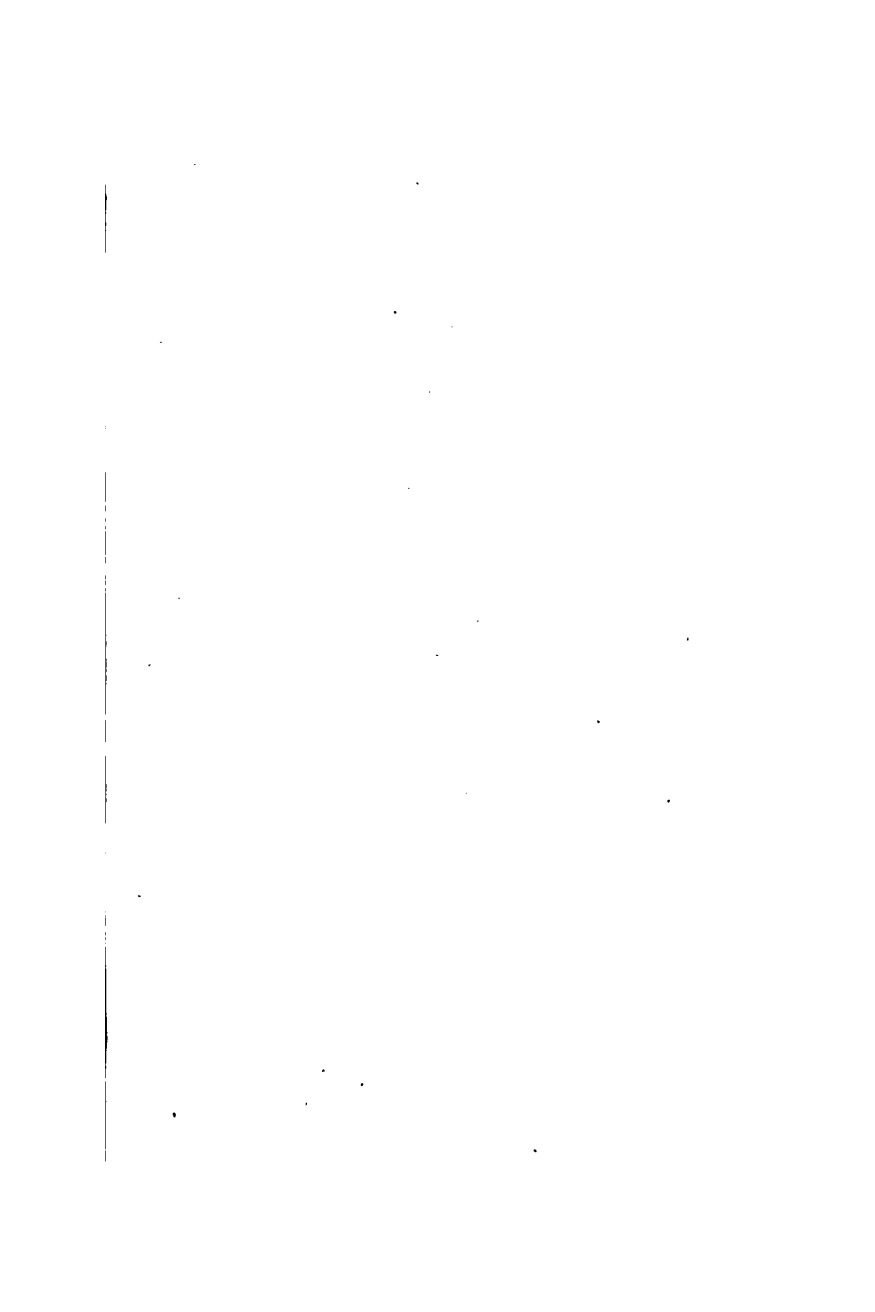
It is matter of gratulation to friends of christianity, that, notwithstanding such differences, there has long been a harmonious and happy intercourse between the churches of these two denominations. And this intercourse has tended to assimilate the parties, in spirit if not in form. Presbyterianism as it exists in the United

States, is exceedingly and increasingly unlike the Presbyterianism which reigns in Scotland, and that which the Westminster Assembly proposed in England. The free spirit of Congregationalism already breathes through the forms of Presbyterian rule. Difficult and alarming controversies, when carried up to Synod or Assembly, are now ordinarily settled, not by judicial decrees, but by advice and persuasion, by friendly mediation and fraternal compromise. Less and less reliance is placed on creeds and legislation to maintain truth and purity; and the truth itself and the spirit of prayer and enterprise are more and more relied on. It is felt daily, more and more, that no ecclesiastical council, under whatever name, can do any good except as it instructs, enlightens, and persuades those whom it would influence.











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